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REVIEW



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POETRY
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ENVIRONMENT
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DESIGN
Roy Behrens
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CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Margaret Atwood
Richard Brook
Leo J. Hertz
Kenneth Lash
John Lindberg
Barry Lopez
Stephen Minot
Mary Peterson
Lawrence Sturhahn

BUSINESS MANAGER
Charlotte L. Wilson

EDITORIAL &

BUSINESS OFFICES:

University of Northern Iowa
Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614

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REVIEW

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The sale has been going on for several hours when you arrive. You park down the road at the end of a long line of cars and trucks. Cormac McCarthy had it right in his novel, *Child of God*. "They came like a caravan of carnival folk," he says, describing the sale of the main character's place. Here it is late February. Although the sun is out, the wind still feels raw. Men mill around wearing heavy coats, bib overalls and boots. For several weeks, the ground has been going through its daily cycle of freeze and thaw, at best giving a spongy feeling to the grass, at worst miring boots in rolls of brown mud.

The farm is typical of Iowa, typical of many farms in the Midwest. The house is painted white, two stories, with black tar paper nailed along the bottom of the north side. Bales of straw have been stacked around the foundation for insulation. Iowa has just gone through one of its fiercer winters, and years of fence-to-fence farming have reduced the number of trees that block the wind.

A few out-buildings gape open where various pieces of equipment, rolls of wire and twisted metal, are stored. A barn sits to the south, typically painted red, but the paint is blistered, a sign, country wisdom assumes, of carelessness or abuse. For the sale's purposes, a hay-rack has been pulled up to the yard light. On the bed in boxes and sacks are the fast items, hand tools, twine, a vise unbolted from its work bench. The only woman at the sale vends coffee and sandwiches from the rear of a camper, and you realize such a sale is still a male's proposition in rural Iowa, that even the farmer's wife hasn't come out to see how it's going.

Following the crowd, you find the farmer who is selling out. Untypically, he appears to be close to thirty, red-haired and wearing grease-stained coveralls. He's trailed by what looks like his younger brother, a freckled version of himself. He says little, mostly stands there to answer questions about equipment: did he buy an auger new? how much water does a tank hold? There is a tension between the auctioneer and the farmer that you can see in his eyes, the self-effacing look of the defeated that struggles not to rise to anger; does so only once, when late in

Selling Out in West Branch, Iowa

the sale, a tractor doesn't get the price he wants.

"I can't sell it for less than ten thousand," he mutters to the auctioneer. On his side, there are the debts he needs to pay. On the auctioneer's side, there is the percentage he takes from the receipts. He is a large man, face pitted and eyes watery from the cold. Someone laughs in the back of the crowd; another spits to the ground already churned to mud by their boots.

"He can't sell it for less than ten, Gentlemen," he says. The farmer looks down at the ground, still angry. He knows the shame is part of it because the auctioneer has been working his failure, selling equipment he'd patched and painted for prices even he would have paid, knowing they had to have bargains to keep the crowd there.

"He won't sell for less than ten," the auctioneer says again. His cane goes up like a dog's tail. "We'll begin at ten then. Anyone give me ten?" he says, not yet in the rhythm, not yet driving the price by the mixture of bullying and good humor that has held them with him all day.

"Anyone give me ten? Brand new tractor. Bought just last year."

A drunk man slips. His eyes are

red-rimmed, and he curses the mud that has smeared up his thigh.

"How many hours you work it, son?" the auctioneer says, no longer into the microphone, but still loud enough for those crowded in to hear.

The farmer mumbles a number, and you hear the disgust break out from the center like waves.

Seven hundred. You drove it too much, the silence says.

But it's brand new, the farmer argues back silently, you see what else I got. I had to use something good.

"We'll start at ten. Anyone give me ten," the auctioneer's voice is tense now, the crowd no longer looking at his face. There is about them the quality of cattle huddled against a windbreak. The voice is more rhythmical, as if to tell them it's time to begin. "We'll start at ten, ten, ten. Anyone give me ten? No ten? How about helping this fella out?" The last stated plainly, more out of disgust than as a plea.

You drove it too much, the silence says. You drove it too much, and you didn't even know how to farm. Anyone could have told you not to buy new equipment, but you wouldn't listen. You wanted everything too quickly, and now you want us to help you out.

"No ten? You want to come down, son?" This said quietly, but it is his first sign of anger all day. You find yourself hunkering like the others, trying not to stare at another's shame.

The farmer looks at him, then shakes his head.

"Leave it for later, Lester," the auctioneer tells his assistant.

* * *

They sell the last of the equipment quickly, two smaller tractors and an auger and bin. You wander to a garage where bank employees are taking checks. Beneath a card table, a portable heater blasts warm air.

"Do all right?" you ask a clerk you recognize, and he gives a shrug.

"Too late in the year to make much," he says. "Most folks already got their equipment set for spring."

Tractors are firing, and you go out to watch as they one after another ram through a mud hole. It is the only way to a pasture where they load just-bought stock tanks and feeding troughs. Each time the mud folds



back and sucks at the wheels. At last, a pick-up slides into it and spins up to its axle in slop.

"Why did he sell?" you ask a farmer you know. Arvo Uuskallio is a Finnish immigrant who lives nearby. Over eighty, he's seen farming change continually since the time he

came to West Branch and bought a few acres to begin.

"I tell you," he says coming closer. "His family quit backing him. They wanted him out." His answer is too much for him, and he stands off, shaking his head. "What you going to do if your family don't help you?" he

says nearly spitting the words. His eyes begin to water, and you realize it is as much from the agitation as from the cold. "I tell them that, too."

"It's too bad," you say to calm him, and he shakes his head.

"Yah," he whispers. "Too bad."
— Jonathan Griffith

ANTECEDENTS

"He ain't your real father,"
he says of the man he has displaced.
The words hang over the saw's slurr
and the hiss of wind
until the stovelength cut of maple
clunks on the pile
and we pause to begin again.
"If you don't believe me,
ask your mother," he says,
not satisfied with the way his words
seem sloughed-off in the wind
and my silence. He can't see,
here in the lee of the shed
where snowflakes slant down easy
and the dark closes in
on our corner of light,
how my left hand on the log between us
tenses to leap at his face
and split it
like dry pine.

Nights, years,
go by like this. She waits for him
to come thumbing through the cold
from the garage in town,
her body-man,
with his battered hands and his drink.

Supper waits in the warming-oven
if no one gives him a lift.
She loves us both,
but for him that's one too many.
He's a man who needs it all
to take him out of the terror
of his dreams.

After supper, now,
he's telling me this again
in another way. What he tells me
as we cut wood for tomorrow's fires
is no lie but truth used
to do the devil's work.
We pull the pulpsaw between us
in silence, for an hour, two;
then he splits and I carry,
the double-bitted axe flashing
wild in the light above us.
I'm thirteen this winter
in which I've learned I'm fatherless,
that meanness can breed
at the root of sex, that
the man I share my labor with
is down-deep mean, that someday
his meanness in me
will make both of us bleed.

Eric Trethewey

Robert Coles' five volume study, *The Children of Crisis*, forms a monumental portrait of the children of America over the past two decades. Coles' work began in the late 1950s in New Orleans, where he studied several black children who were being placed in all-white schools in that city's first attempts at school integration. The first volume, published in 1967, explored the lives of these children in their own words and the words of their teachers, parents, neighbors and fellow students—and showed the strengths and weaknesses of our country at a critical point in its history. The four subsequent volumes have focussed on the crises faced by poor black and white children in Northern cities, on the children of other "disadvantaged" groups including Eskimos, Chicanos, Indians, migrant workers, Appalachian mountaineers; and, most recently, on the very different problems of children in upper class families. Currently under way is volume VI, work with children in Northern Ireland and South Africa.

Though *Children of Crisis* deals with social conflict, the series is not precisely sociology, and though Robert Coles is a child psychiatrist, it is not psychiatric or medical—or anthropological or literary, for that matter. The techniques of all these disciplines are used—cautiously, one might add—for the purpose of exploring the crises faced by various groups of children, of showing the world as it is—an aim now largely abandoned by novelists in favor of subjective fictions, and by social scientists in favor of theory. Yet Coles' fearsomely energetic impulse in *Children of Crisis* is to show the children's lives in all their complexity, to explore, to awaken. Robert Coles is a doctor who has seen everything, a writer who has read, it seems, everything, and now for two decades has been compelled to tell the world

what he has seen. He is insistently, gratingly *there*. And while at times one feels his writing goes on over-long and would be better off with closer organization, at its best it forms a portrait of childhood that is *sui generis*—beyond categorization. By refusing to subjugate his writing to a particular school of thought, one or another set of sociological or psychiatric theories, Coles speaks to the public at large. And in all it is the eye of the doctor that informs his work and gives it coherence. Coles' words about William Carlos Williams apply to his own works: "The reader is confronted with a blunt, at times abrasive if wise physician who clearly knows his way around, but who seems, at times, ready to throw in the towel: all those demands from all those people." Like the Williams of the *Life along the Passaic* stories, Coles writes about "plain, ordinary people . . . whose knack of survival he [cannot] help regarding with a mixture of admiration, sadness and bitterness."

In addition to the volumes of *Children of Crisis*, Robert Coles has published twenty-five other books in the past dozen years. These have included: *Erik Erikson: The Growth of his Work*, a biography nominated for the National Book Award; *Walker Percy: An American Search*, a literary and philosophical biography of that Southern doctor novelist; *The Knack of Survival in America*, a critical work on the fiction of William Carlos Williams; *Irony in the Mind's Life*, criticism on works by Elizabeth Bowen, James Agee and George Eliot; several books done in conjunction with photographers, including *Still Hungry in America*; a half dozen children's books; a collection of poetry; and two volumes of *Women of Crisis*, co-authored by his wife, Jane Hallowell Coles. This spring a critical biography of Flannery O'Connor is due.

On Medicine & Literature:

Interviewer: Much of the *Children of Crisis* volumes is made up of interviews. Do you generally use a tape recorder?

Coles: When I was in college, I got to know William Carlos Williams, and I used to follow him around and tape record his medical rounds in northern New Jersey. He was an old-fashioned, what we'd now call Family Practice doctor—he was a pediatrician and an obstetrician, and basically a General Practitioner. I'd visit him and he'd take me into the homes of his patients. He'd listen to them carefully, both as a writer and as a doctor, and then when he left each home, he'd sit in his car and write notes. I'd say, "What are you doing?" And he'd say he was writing down the wonderful expressions he heard from them. He would later use them in his poems. And some of the stories he heard from them he worked into those wonderful *Life along the Passaic* stories, which are doctor stories, really. He used to say, "The important thing is to *hear*." I've found that when I've used the tape recorder, at times it was because I thought I wasn't a scientist if I didn't have everything tape recorded. And then I'd remember what Dr. Williams said, and slowly I started weaning myself from it. But it's hard because you figure you get everything that

way. And it has interfered at times, because I didn't listen as closely as when I didn't have it.

Interviewer: So when you didn't have it, you'd just write things down?

Coles: Afterwards. I'd write it all down. And I'd edit what I heard—you edit the tape anyway—I think I was editing in my mind as I was writing it down. You write down what you feel you really want to remember. It's a complicated thing, how you do this work.

Interviewer: I imagine you must have libraries full of tapes.

Coles: I do. I have a lot of tapes, and then more recently a lot of notes on my yellow pads. And often, even when I was using the tapes, I'd sit down in the evening and write an essay in which the important things that I heard were put together. Lately I've been working in Northern Ireland, in Belfast with the Catholic and Protestant children caught up in that struggle, and in South Africa with the black children in Soweto and Afrikaaner children in Pretoria. I found myself not using the tape recorder.

Robert Coles was born and raised in Boston. He graduated Harvard College in 1950 with a major in History and Literature, then attended Columbia Medical School. He interned at U. of Chicago Clinics, and did residency training in psychiatry at the Massachusetts General and McLean Hospitals, and in child psychiatry at Children's Hospital in Boston. He subsequently served as chief of an Air Force neuropsychiatric unit in Mississippi for two years, and it was at that time that his work with black children involved in school desegregation began. Dr. Coles is Professor of Medical Humanities at Harvard Medical School and teaches courses at both undergraduate and medical school levels.

The interview took place in Cambridge, Massachusetts, at 10 a.m. of a windy March morning. Dr. Coles' office is in the basement of a brick house, a former Harvard club, across the street from Harvard University Health Services and close by Elsie's, a lunch counter popular with Harvard students for its turkey and roast beef sandwiches. At the interviewer's knock, Dr. Coles came to the door to let him in. Coles is of medium height, slightly built, with short-cropped black hair. His head is large, his face mobile and expressive, giving one the impression of great intensity, and at the same time, fatigue. His left hand is congenitally smaller than the right, so it is almost a child's hand. He wore battered high workman's boots, worn corduroy pants and an open-necked shirt.

He ushered the interviewer into his office and went through the morning's mail as the tape recorder was being set up. The basement room is windowless, containing a nappy blue couch

with a pillow at one end, which occasionally serves a psychoanalytic purpose, a wooden desk and several chairs. The walls are covered by political posters from South Africa, New Mexico and Alaska—vivid images in bright reds and yellows and blacks—by large photographs of James Agee and Erik Erikson, by the framed frontispiece of Coles' *New Yorker* article on Walker Percy, a framed cover of the *New Republic*. Some yellowed newspaper clippings are taped to the side of a filing cabinet, one with a small photograph of Flannery O'Connor. The wooden bookshelf is crowded with the works of George Eliot, Anna Freud, Georges Bernanos, William Carlos Williams, Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, various philosophers including Kierkegaard, Hegel, Marcel and Heidegger; several of Coles' own books in paperback are interspersed among them and stacked on the floor.

When the interviewer was ready Coles moved his chair closer to the blue couch, on which rested the tape recorder—which in fact formed the subject for the first part of the interview. Coles' voice was hoarse, reinforcing the gauntness of his physical appearance. He formed his sentences with great care, often stopping in the middle of a sentence to amend or elaborate an idea, or to insist on the complexity of the situations of which he was speaking and of the need for caution in making generalizations about the children with whom he has worked—whether white, black, Indian, Mexican or Eskimo. Though one had the impression he had given innumerable interviews in the past, he was not glib or rehearsed, or particularly self-protective. At times he could be severely critical of his own preconceptions as an observer and of his own work.—D.H.

An Interview with Robert Coles

by David Hellerstein

Interviewer: Not at all?

Coles: Just occasionally. I'd use it so I could listen to the voices, for the use of language and dialect. I felt that I learned a lot just by listening and writing down afterwards what I had heard, rather than by trying to catch every word.

Interviewer: I carried several of your books home from the Cambridge library last week, a very thick stack of books—and I began to wonder how you are able to write so much. They had nearly twenty of your books: the *Children of Crisis* series, biographies, criticism, children's books, poetry. How do you manage to do all that?

Coles: I write on yellow lined legal pads. I write in the mornings, early, just after my children have gone to school. I think about what I'm going to write the night before. Then I sit down and by golly, I write. I write on a quota basis. I try to write three to four yellow pages a day, five days a week. And if you keep on doing that with some—almost a religious—dedication, the books mount up over the years. One of the reasons is some

sort of a necessary feeling I have that I must do this fairly regularly. The only time I stop writing is when I'm out in the so-called field. That is, when I was in South Africa or Belfast I didn't write much, other than the notes I was taking. But when I'm at home either teaching or doing my work in this country, visiting families—usually I don't visit the families until the afternoons because the kids are in school all day—I will write in the mornings, and that writing mounts up. If you stop and think about it . . . also I have sort of a cramped hand, a cramped writing hand, so I would estimate that I probably write eight hundred to a thousand words a day.

Interviewer: Then do you revise a lot after that?

Coles: Yes. What I do is revise one time. All that is typed up. Then I approach the typed version with a whole new personality. I look at it as an editor—and I'm very tough with my own writing. Maybe some critics would say not tough enough. But there is a difference. If you saw the first draft, you'd see the difference. I cannot edit my own handwriting. It has to be typed. And then I just slash into it. As I say, maybe I should learn how to

slash into it better. There is that very important second stage of the writing, though—it's edited. And then it's done.

Interviewer: You mentioned your friendship with William Carlos Williams. How did you come to know him?

Coles: As an undergraduate at Harvard I majored in a combined English and History field, and I wrote my thesis on Dr. Williams and his poem *Paterson* and the novel *White Mule* which enormously interested me. At that time, in 1950, Dr. Williams was not quite as celebrated as he later became in the sixties. He died in 1963, and when I was doing this writing he was a well-known poet but by no means well accepted in the academic circles, the university circles. The only reason I was able to work so well and congenially at Harvard on that subject, namely him, was because of Perry Miller, who was a professor of English and American literature at Harvard and was an enormous influence on me. He was an English professor, but I think it's also fair to call him a theologian. He was very much interested in the Puritan mind, and in the moral issues the Puritans struggled with, and he was interested in the literature which that generated. And that was my major undergraduate preoccupation. But I had read Williams' poetry and wanted to write about him, and Miller encouraged me to do so and was my mentor. I envisioned myself going to graduate school and becoming a student of Miller's in American Literature. After I had written my paper on Williams, Miller encouraged me to send it to him. I got a reply from Dr. Williams, saying, "Any time you're here, come and say hello." And boy, I went down to New York fast. I then became a friend of his, a young friend of his. He was very, very helpful, as an older person. I talked a lot with him.

Interviewer: And he encouraged you to go into medicine?

Coles: Well, yes. I became so impressed with the dual life he lived as a physician and as a writer/social observer of sorts that I thought maybe I'd give it a try myself. So I started taking on premedical courses, and I applied to medical school. I was turned down by four or five of them, because they thought I was a little flaky, I think, although I did well in the premedical courses. They'd often ask me what kind of a doctor I'd want to be. I'd say that I wasn't sure but . . . and then I'd tell them what I'm telling you now. But at Physicians and Surgeons, at Columbia, I was interviewed by a man named Philip Miller—the same surname but obviously no relation to Perry Miller. He was a biochemist. He interviewed me, and I told him how I'd come to that point in my life. He said, "By golly, we ought to take someone like you, even if you're not sure you want to finish medical school." So they did take me. I had to struggle in medical school, because I wasn't really adequately prepared for the sciences, and I didn't do too well in them. But I managed to get by. I would visit Dr. Williams, and I was very much interested in religious matters through Perry Miller and through my own life. I would go to Union Theological Seminary, where I took a seminar which Reinhold Niebuhr gave before he had his first stroke, which was in '52, I think. I guess I was trying to combine my medical life as a

student with these interests in religion and in literature. That I think has been the struggle that I've waged all my life.

When I finished medical school I interned at the University of Chicago. And even then I remember as an intern, with my white uniform, dashing out of the hospital because Paul Tillich was giving some lectures at the University of Chicago. Also during that year, Dr. Williams came, even though he'd had a stroke and was partially paralyzed. He came and read in the Rockefeller Chapel there, read his poems. It was a very poignant meeting for those of us who knew him, because it was hard for him to talk. Yet there was something in him that wanted to take that poetry of his and share it with others. When I finished up that year I came back to Boston. The question came up: what was I going to do with my medical training and internship? I guess by this time I realized I couldn't go into Pediatrics, which was my major interest, because I wasn't tough enough. The kids would undo me. They'd start crying and I'd almost want to join up—cry. And that's not good. So Bill Williams suggested, "Why don't you try going into Psychiatry, Child Psychiatry, and get to the kids that way." So I did. I took a residency at the Massachusetts General Hospital, at McLean Hospital, and then at Children's Hospital for a couple of years in Child Psychiatry. And by this time I had become so immersed in Child Psychiatry that I tended to stop reading a lot of the books in theology and even in literature that I'd been reading. But then I was drafted into the Air Force under the doctors' draft, and I went down to Mississippi where they put me in charge of an Air Force neuropsychiatric unit. That was where my whole life really changed a second time, because the whole Civil Rights Movement was getting going, and children were being marched into desegregated schools in New Orleans in the face of all the violence that was going on. I've described what happened to me in the first chapter of the first volume of *Children of Crisis*. This was kind of . . . This changed my life. I stayed there and got involved with these children, involved with the Civil Rights Movement.

Interviewer: Were you particularly vulnerable then to getting involved in that conflict? You described in your book *Walker Percy: An American Search* that it was "a critical time" and you were "somewhat lost, confused, vulnerable, and it seemed, drifting badly."

Coles: I *was* drifting, I think. I guess I was trying to figure out how to combine this medical life that I had with my interests in literature and a kind of complicated religious background that I have. My mother comes from the Midwest, actually from Iowa. She is an Episcopalian. And my father comes from a Jewish background, from England; they've lost their religion for a few hundred years. They were Sephardic Jews who came from Spain originally, and had been in England for several hundred years. He's an agnostic scientist. So I . . . these balancing acts . . .

Interviewer: So you had a religious and a scientific background.

Coles: Exactly.

Interviewer: Were you a religious child then?

Coles: Oh yes! My mother took us . . . We were brought up in Boston, my brother and I, with a good deal of religious, Christian, faith, I think it's fair to say. I struggle with that. At times I guess I'm an agnostic, and at times I'm very much connected to the Old and New Testaments. I love to read Jeremiah and Isaiah and Amos, and I love to read Mark and Luke and Matthew and John and St. Paul. The Bible means a lot to me, and theology means a lot to me. Williams, by the way, had no interest in religion. He was a wonderfully agnostic, exuberant, here-and-now person. And in a strange way that was a problem. Because I was drawn to T.S. Eliot's poetry, from college days on. And you know, Eliot and Williams had a rough time with one another.

Interviewer: *In the American Grain* by Williams is full of that.

Coles: Yeah, they really were antagonists. I couldn't figure out how it was that at the same time I was both an admirer of Eliot's and an admirer of Williams'. Once I talked to Williams about this. He said, "Well, you're not me. You can have this kind of distance. I'm in the middle of a fight, you're an observer." But you know, Williams was partly Jewish, too. And later I got involved with Erik Erikson, who is also partly Jewish. So this continuity in my life is strange, this involvement with people who have juggled religious issues. Erikson had been an artist before he went into psychoanalysis, and I think I identified with this struggle to go back and forth between the world of science—in his case psychoanalysis, in my case medicine—and the world of literature. And religion too, because of Erikson's involvement with Luther and Gandhi. *Moral* literature as well as novelistic literature.

Interviewer: So if you had it over again, would you have gone to medical school?

Coles: Definitely. It was a very important part of my life. I got to know patients as individuals, and I still remember many of them I treated as an intern. I went back and did a year of Pediatrics just before I went into the Air Force, so I guess I managed to get that pediatric side of me well built up, as well as the psychiatric side. I think a doctor has a marvelous opportunity to get to know people in ways that perhaps no one else can.

Interviewer: Did your medical training make you a better writer?

Coles: Well in my particular case it did. I knew Flannery O'Connor when she was sick, in the hospital and very ill. She was in Georgia, and we were living in Georgia for several years, when I was working in the Civil Rights Movement and with school desegregation in Atlanta. I had a long talk with her in the Emory Hospital. Obviously writers use their imaginations and don't need to have access to anyone, other than the richness of their own minds which is more than enough for them. But because she had been involved with doctors in the struggle she waged against lupus, she said that she thought it would be a marvelous opportunity for a

writer to be in these situations. And of course some writers have been doctors. One thinks of Chekhov and again Dr. Williams and Walker Percy. But clearly many writers have had no need for medical training to become the great writers that they've been. And obviously many doctors are not interested in writing. I think one thing that medical training offers, which is worthy of consideration by people with other interests, is that it's a really helpful antidote to social science. A person who has gone through the empirical training of medical school, and who understands the uniqueness of the individual which medical training reveals, does have an opportunity to do social science work in a way that I happen to think is very important, that is, with a respect for the humanities, for their concentration on individuality, their emphasis on irony and paradox and inconsistency and contrariness rather than the emphasis that social science training tends to place on theory and on abstraction and on trying to generalize almost at all costs. Sometimes the costs are very high.

Interviewer: Have you become more suspicious of abstraction and theory, of categorization into types and stages? It seemed to me, in going through your books, that there was a certain progression.

Coles: And you probably noticed a certain increasing animus against my own profession. Well, you're right. I started out as a psychiatrist, and I started getting psychoanalytic training in New Orleans at the New Orleans Psychoanalytic Training Center, which later became a full-fledged Institute. I was . . . I think maybe I still am a smug, self-centered person. But if I am, I was even more so then. Boy, it's embarrassing



when I stop to think of the psychiatric arrogance I was a victim of. It took me a few years to comprehend. This was what going into the homes of ordinary black and white people in the South tended to confront me with—my own narrowness and blindness and smugness and narcissism. Here I met people who were facing a tremendous social and historical crisis, and who were acquitting themselves with dignity, or showing the fear and anxiety of people who are threatened in ways that I had never been threatened. My whole way of thinking about them, with all the psychiatric terms and all the quickness to judge people indirectly through psychiatric categorizations—all of that was of little use in understanding the lives of these people. I had to begin to think of a way of looking at them that was different from that of psychiatry. Of course what one realizes is that there are always George Eliot and Charles Dickens and Dostoevsky—and all the writers who have helped one over the years to understand human beings—who are waiting in the wings to help you to get to know the people you're talking with in these homes. So I think I became somewhat disenchanted with my profession, and I think I began to lose interest in its way of thinking—and in its language, which is rather prolix and self-important.

Interviewer: Do you feel just that the *psychiatric* categorizations are useless, or that no system of thought can explain the various ways in which people, both children and adults, respond to crisis?

Coles: Flannery O'Connor put it beautifully. She said, "The task of the novelist is not to 'resolve' mystery but to deepen it!" The danger with social science, the danger for that matter with any kind of intellectual process, is that we take ourselves too seriously, and that we forget the difference between products of our own thinking and the world itself. We impose our notion of reality on the world and see only our notion of reality rather than the defiant complexity of the world—and of course the mystery of the world. Now, I'm caught in the middle, as you point out. On the one hand, I want to clarify and observe and point out and understand, and in a sense simplify in the non-pejorative sense of the word 'simplify.' But on the other hand, I'm constantly impressed with mystery, and maybe even feel that there are certain things that cannot be understood or clarified through generalizations, that resolve themselves into matters of individuality, and again, are part of the mystery of the world that one celebrates as a writer, rather than tries to solve and undo as a social scientist.

Interviewer: If you had it to do again, would you have not trained in psychiatry?

Coles: I think I would have gone into Pediatrics and maybe Family Medicine, if I had it over again. I'd probably do Primary Care Medicine is my hunch. At that time they didn't have it. And the kind of Public Health they had when I was a medical student was a matter of memorizing the charts of the life cycles of some species of worm in distant Africa, while at the same time there we were, just a few blocks from Harlem. And we never went there.

Interviewer: In reading *Still Hungry in America*, I was struck by the passages in which you talked about the diseases you'd seen—the malnutrition, skin ulcers, the parasitic infestations, the untreated serious kidney and heart diseases. Do you feel a special obligation since you're both a doctor and a writer? How can you leave those people after you've seen the very treatable conditions that are making their lives miserable?

Coles: That's a very important ethical point, and the only way I could answer that is to say that in the instances I have seen them I have done something. That's been a part of my work, to get them medical care. It's hard for me to write about that because it seems rather self-serving to say, "Look, I treated these people," which is what every doctor does. But the fact is that's what I have done. In every region of the country that I've worked, I've gotten involved with the existing medical situation. The kids and their families, I've come to know them over the period of a year or two, and pretty well. Visiting them I've come to know their medical problems, as well as trying to understand their feelings and their attitudes toward the world. And I have indeed gotten them connected to medical facilities when that's been necessary. Now the other side of one's contribution, at least one *hopes* it's a contribution, is that after all as a writer you can call attention to the larger issues that these people are struggling with. And in the case of hunger, my involvement in testimony before the United States Senate, and that very book which came as a result of that, was a part of the effort to get the Food Stamp program going, and to get this seen as a national problem rather than a series of individual cases.

Interviewer: So do you think your work has had a substantial effect?

Coles: Well I don't know. To tell you the truth I wish it had a *more* substantial effect. I've testified again and again before various Congressional committees on migrant children, on the problem of hunger and malnutrition, on the problems of ghetto kids, on problems of school desegregation—a whole range of issues that have affected families and children. Sometimes I think some of that testimony has had some value, but at other times one despairs. But one tries. The problems of black lung disease among miners—I've testified again and again about that. And we have made some progress there. Black lung disease is now recognized as a medical entity that is connected to the occupational hazards of mining, and the miners who get black lung disease in recent years have been compensated for the disease. When I started this work in Appalachia that wasn't the case, and I think part of the victory was due to medical and social testimony from people like me. And there've been a number of us who have offered that testimony—doctors and social observers who were involved with mountain families who had miners in the family, miners who we got to know. Some of the legislation concerning migrant children drew upon the observations that some of us have made about how migrant children live and what their educational and medical problems are. I wish that migrant families were living much better than they are today. And the occu-

pational health legislation which affects black lung disease, and very importantly, *brown* lung disease, that is, among the textile workers of North and South Carolina, I wish that there were more and better laws. So on the one hand one works with these issues, but one is also pretty . . . at times discouraged. Certainly discouraged during the Nixon years, but even now, one wishes that this country could do more for the marginal social groups that are getting a pretty raw deal.

Interviewer: In *Irony in the Mind's Life*, you quote from George Eliot's *Middlemarch*: "Who can quit young lives after being long in company with them and not desire to know what befell them in their after-years?" I was wondering about the kids in the first volume of *Children of Crisis*—whether you'd ever be going back to them?

Coles: I have been. I go back once a year to the South and visit some of those families. I suppose I could call it follow-up work, but it's really just visits to people who were so wonderful to us, who taught us so much, and offered us so much hospitality. That's a beautiful quote from *Middlemarch*. We have done that, my wife and I. And some of those kids of course we've followed so long they are obviously no longer children, but are themselves in their twenties or thirties and parents.

Interviewer: Have you written about it?

Coles: A bit in *Farewell to the South*, a collection of essays. There's a long introduction in which I offer some follow-ups. But you know, when you've travelled as much as I have, and lived in so many different parts of the United States—I've been in every American state, including Alaska obviously, and Hawaii, all fifty states, and worked in every region of the country, North, South, East and West—there comes a point when you can't follow up all the people you've met, unless you're in a state of constant manic ascension, with no sleep and moving around endlessly from airport to airport. But there always have been one or two families with whom we've been especially involved, and those are the families we've kept up with, just making a visit every year or so to say hello. I'm haunted though by that question of George Eliot . . . oh well, I'm haunted by George Eliot.

Interviewer: So you have seen changes when you've gone back to visit the people you first wrote about?

Coles: Some changes. I see some changes, and Lord knows, having been involved with SNCC and the whole Civil Rights Movement, I've seen wonderful changes with respect to segregation and school desegregation, to the point that school desegregation by and large is more a reality in the South than in my own home town of Boston, and if that isn't an irony, what is? I've seen a lot of social and racial changes in the South, and I've seen some changes for the better among the people in Appalachia, but there are also things that haven't changed much. For instance, we lived in New Mexico for several years, and I worked on the reservations of the Southwest, and the problems of the Indian people are very severe and *not* getting better. I worked

in Alaska with Eskimo families, and the problems that Eskimos face are now getting *worse* rather than better, due to the pipeline, the refineries, the influx suddenly of a combination welfare economy and a one-time glut of cash. They've suddenly been yanked out of a subsistence economy in which nevertheless they have a certain amount of dignity and personal sense of themselves as hunters and fishermen—and now what are they? So you see alcoholism, and you see a kind of passivity and dependence on the visit of the airplane once a week to the village with pizzas. You go into the villages and you hear Linda Ronstadt blaring forth on hi-fi and you see skimobiles and kids drinking Cokes and eating pizzas and potato chips, and you say, here's modern America in these Eskimo villages. And though there are advantages to this, there are also severe moral and psychological losses. It's a real problem, how the Eskimos are coming to terms with the sudden presence of technology and money and so-called "Lower Forty-Eight" civilization. The risk is that one gets condescending. The Eskimos themselves, some of them, will say, "Hey, listen, this is what we want, just like you people have wanted it." But there's a good deal of evidence that, in addition to what they have gotten out of this, that is in the way of cash, they've experienced a substantial loss in morale, and in their own self-respect. They weren't prepared for contemporary American life as most of us were, because it crept up on us gradually over a generation or two. Our ancestors came here and were part of building up whatever this country is—and Eskimos suddenly had it thrown at them. So it's a mixed answer I'd have to give you.

Interviewer: In the past twenty or thirty years, medicine has become more institutionalized and technically oriented; and relatively little interest is placed in the kinds of social issues you're so involved in. And very little interest in what one might call the medical humanities. Do you as a result feel estranged from the medical profession?

Coles: I don't know, I don't know that. You'd have to ask other doctors. One student here was interviewed for medical schools, and mentioned that he'd taken a course with me—this in conjunction with his own interest in writing. He was told by the people on the admissions committee that they didn't think he ought to go to medical school if he wanted to be a writer, and that if I happened to have pulled this off that was fine, but they didn't want people announcing before they even get to medical school that they were interested in going to medical school because of an interest in writing and the help this would give them as writers. And I can understand that; I mean, there's such a need for doctors, and I think they felt this was a little frivolous. Also I didn't go to medical school to get a medical education from which I would then draw upon as a writer. I went to medical school out of a real desire to become a doctor and live the doctor's life that I'd seen Dr. Williams living, and also that I'd seen an uncle of mine living, my mother's brother. And somehow later in life I connected these interests.

I've written articles for the *New England Journal of Medicine*, for the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

tion, on writers—I've written on Flannery O'Connor and Dr. Williams for the *JAMA*, and I've even written about *Middlemarch* for the *New England Journal of Medicine*. And I've written for the *American Journal of Psychiatry* and for psychoanalytic journals—and I've done book reviews for many of them. So somehow, again, it's a tightrope. I've balanced this life in some way. I love . . . I still read the *New England Journal of Medicine* and I read the medical articles in it, not just the social comment. And I do think of myself as a physician, very much so. One reviewer said I'm a writing doctor. And that was very well put. If I had more ability, I'd write novels like Walker Percy or I'd write poetry such as Dr. Williams did—but I don't have that ability, I just don't have the ability to do that. So I . . . if you don't have the ability you don't have the ability.

Interviewer: Haven't you published a book of poetry?

Coles: I have written poetry, and I've listened to children and pulled their words together in a form that I guess one would consider a kind of poetry. It's not the best kind, but . . . but I have written poetry and some of it has been published, and there is the book of poems drawing on the work with children.

Interviewer: Are you teaching now?

Coles: Yes. I teach a course in the Medical Humanities at Harvard Medical School, and I teach undergraduates two things. I teach an undergraduate course called "Moral and Social Inquiry." We start with James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. We read George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier*. We go on to read Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy, Ralph Ellison, Tillie Olson, Dorothy Day's autobiography called *The Long Loneliness*, about the Catholic Worker Movement. And we end up with *Jude the Obscure* of Thomas Hardy, and *Middlemarch* of George Eliot. So it's a mixture of novels and social documentary writing and autobiography and moral essays. And we see some movies that connect with the reading we've done. We read *The Diary of a Country Priest* by Bernanos, and we see the movie that Bresson did. And then last Fall I taught a seminar called "Religion and Twentieth Century Intellectuals." So I teach on both sides. And at the Medical School what we read is William Carlos Williams' doctor stories, *Life along the Passaic River*, Walker Percy's novels *The Moviegoer* and *The Last Gentleman* and *Love in the Ruins*—all of which have a doctor in them. The first one is a future medical student, and in both *The Last Gentleman* and *Love in the Ruins* a physician is a central part of the narrative. We read *Middlemarch* which has Dr. Lydgate, and we read *Arrowsmith*, the old favorite, that unfortunately is read by too many medical students when they've been in high school or college. Anyway, we use novels to approach medical issues.

Interviewer: Do you read different kinds of doctors' writing—Celine or William Burroughs?

Coles: Celine is especially important, and I haven't used him yet, but I'm going to next year. I think he's a very interesting physician—that's for sure. Obviously it

would be hard for some medical students, as he has been hard for a lot of readers, to take. But I don't regard Celine's fascism as the central issue in his life. I think the issue in his life is that of his disgust for the hypocrisy of the world, a world that he saw from the point of view of a doctor as well as a political person. He's an interesting writer, a very gifted writer. He would be a valuable addition to that course, you're absolutely right.

Interviewer: And Burroughs?

Coles: Burroughs I have trouble with. The trouble I have with him is that while politically I'm fairly liberal—quite liberal, I guess—culturally I'm more conservative. I used to have discussions with Williams about this. I guess I can go as far as Williams, not too much further. There's obviously a stodgy part of me culturally. I tend to want to assign nineteenth century writers like George Eliot and Dickens and Hardy to my students—because I think they were wonderful moral observers. Someday I would love to teach a course, maybe at a law school, on Dickens and the Law, because the various kinds of lawyers that he portrayed, and the way he looked at a profession are, I think, still of great interest today. The moral insights he offers us about professional life are very shrewd. You go from *Bleak House* to *Great Expectations* to the lawyer in *Tale of Two Cities*. And of course, George Eliot, with Dr. Lydgate—you can teach a whole course around *Middlemarch* to medical students or undergraduates. The issue of what makes for the moral decisions of professional life, centered around Lydgate and what happens to him . . .

Interviewer: Have you become more interested in moral issues in recent years?

Coles: No question. I am increasingly interested in moral issues, and the ways that writers, that is novelists and poets, have come to terms with these moral issues. And I'm interested in what these people have to say to people like me, doctors and psychiatrists and intellectuals—though I don't like that last word—to people who are psychologically trained.

Interviewer: You say in the introduction to the first volume of *Children of Crisis* that, "There seems no end to crisis in this world." Is that the case?

Coles: (Laughs.) Or whether I've manufactured crises in order to . . . to justify my writing . . .

Interviewer: Let me rephrase that. How many volumes of *Children of Crisis* will there be?

Coles: Well, there have been five dealing with twenty years of work in America. It is important to point out—I want to make an editorial point here, maybe a self-justifying point—I didn't publish my first book until 1967. And the work started in 1959. So for eight years there were no books. I think if you were to talk with my editor, Peter Davison, who is editor at the Atlantic Monthly Press, he'd tell you that he really had a devil of a time getting me to write that first book. Hard to

believe it may be right now, but I was very reluctant about writing at first, because I was so overwhelmed by the complexity of what I'd seen, and the enormous difficulty I had in doing justice to that complexity as a writer. Now maybe I was overly ambitious in wanting to do justice to that complexity. I suppose I could have carved out some area of it and written psychiatric articles about that area. But I had and still have, over my shoulder, the shadow of someone like George Eliot. Now I'll never be able to do justice to that complexity, the way she did in *Middlemarch*. But by golly, those are the models. She and Tolstoy and Dostoevsky and Henry James, and one at least remembers them as writers. Finally I did write those portraits and the first volume went to press. Since then I've done those other volumes, dealing with the various parts of the country where I've worked. I've been working recently in Northern Ireland, where I think any observer would feel there's "crisis" going on in the children's lives. And I've been working in South Africa, also critically caught up in a racial struggle. And I must say, though I've just turned fifty, and feel myself entitled to stop this fieldwork, I can't do it. I love going into a new part of the world and getting to know children, getting to know their parents and their teachers, and just *seeing* that world, the way maybe Orwell did when he used to do the kind of travelling he finally wrote up in *Down and Out in London and Paris* or in the *Wigan Pier* book. I can't write, again, as well as he; I don't have the gift for narrative presentation that he had. But I do just love to look at the world and try to do justice to some of its rhythms, especially through the eyes of its children. The other thing I would mention is the considerable interest I have in the art of children and in interpreting that art, which goes back to my mother's interest in art. My brother is very much interested in art, and teaches courses at the University of Michigan that connect literature and art. I think that if I've done nothing else in those volumes of *Children of Crisis* and in my other writing about children, I've tried to point out what children's drawings and paintings can teach us about their moral and psychological perceptions. This has been an interest now for over two decades. I've interpreted drawings and connected them to the lives of various children, whether they be black or white or Appalachian or Eskimo or Indian or Chicano children. I think some of that writing has been valuable both for my profession and for interested laymen. And I'd like to continue doing that in connection with children abroad, in Ireland and South Africa, because I think it teaches us something about the relationship between a political or historical crisis, and the ways that children grow up; more abstractly, call it child development or human development.

Interviewer: We've talked about your mistrust of psychiatric categories and language. Yet with the children's drawings you do make interpretations, you do make generalizations in a psychiatric framework.

Coles: But you'll also notice that I'm always taking one step forward and at least a half a step backward, or at least sideways, by making the observations, and trying to put them in other contexts, and maybe even qualifying them or maybe even pointing out that they apply to

these children but might not apply to other children—and that in any case they may be overwrought. And that my own writings may be guilty—probably are guilty—of the various sins that I criticize in other writings. And I use the word sin because I think the issue is moral. How presumptuous is the observer becoming? How godlike does he feel himself to be? And the best people in my profession—people like Erik Erikson and Allan Wheelis, who are my two heroes of sorts within psychoanalysis—they pointed out again and again the limitations of this work, and the need we have for understanding the dangers we get into in connection with our own arrogance, and in connection with gullible or hurt people who want to elevate us into positions we have no right to be put in, or to allow ourselves to be put in. Allan Wheelis points this out in a marvelous essay, "On the Vocational Hazards of Psychoanalysis," which is part of his really fine book called *The Quest for Identity*. He points out that we are put in a godlike position, and become intoxicated with our own self-importance.

Interviewer: After your work with children in South Africa and Northern Ireland is done, what next? Are you working on other biographies or criticism?

Coles: The work in Ireland and South Africa and one or two other countries will take a number of years. I have a book on Flannery O'Connor coming out this spring. And I'm working, in a more intellectual vein, on the life of Simone Weil. She's a source of great interest to me as a moral philosopher, and her life as well as her writing can offer a lot for us to think about. There are certain people whose moral and intellectual example has meant a lot to me. I suppose I'm hoping that I'm given the life to do it, and in one way or another I'll come to terms with their lives. Not necessarily with long biographies, because I'm not really very interested in doing that. But in either intellectual biographies or essays or whatever. Erikson was one, I've done a book on him. I wrote a long paper on Anna Freud because she's meant a lot to me, her work with children. I've written a book in conjunction with a photographer about the Catholic Worker Movement and especially Dorothy Day. I've written some about James Agee, and I think I'll probably end up writing some more about him. Same goes for Orwell. Dr. Percy, I've written a book about him, and a book about Dr. Williams. And Georges Bernanos, the French Catholic novelist, has meant a lot to me. *The Diary of a Country Priest* is one of my favorite novels, and I'd be surprised if in some way I don't come to terms with that. And that just about exhausts the list. (Laughs.) And probably will exhaust my life.

Interviewer: What do all these people who are your heroes have in common?

Coles: What they have in common, I guess, is that they've struggled with moral and religious issues. They have had their literary sides, too—more than sides in some cases. And more than that, there is the issue of service. Orwell struggled with this in a certain way, and Agee, and hence the anguish in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, the issue of how much do you exploit as a writer,

and what do you offer in return to the people you're writing about? This comes up if, as a writer, you are dealing with external reality, if your writing is not made up only of the internal or fictional, subjective experiences which you mold into characters and narration. And since I've been so involved with the world outside of me, this issue comes up: what does one owe the world? You brought this up very appropriately in connection with the hunger issue in the late 1960s.

The hope is, if you're caught up in the Civil Rights Movement or in the struggle migrants are waging for both personal dignity and a larger share of the economic world that they manage to hold up through their labor, that the writing and the testimony and some of the medical work at least pay back some of the debts that you've rung up from going place to place and asking people to tell you things which you then write up and tell to the world at large. It's a haunting question, though: what does one owe? □

NANCY ESPOSITO

A RARE WINE OF GOOD VINTAGE

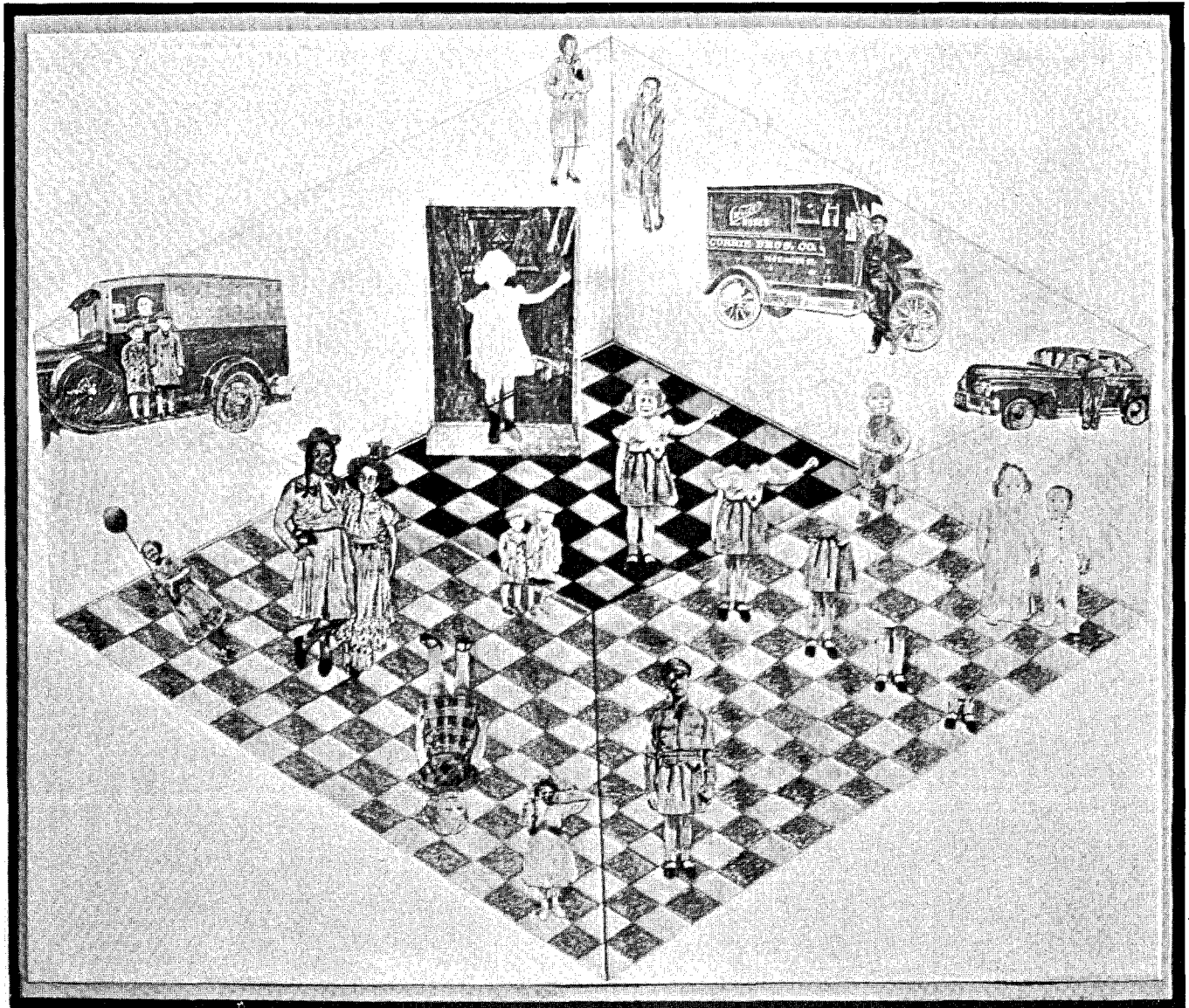
Morning, pulled from its black
scabbard, vandalizes her dreams,
the tangled necklaces of love
untried, a longing fragile
as inherited porcelain. And she is left
to the dispassionate warmth of sheets,
polished finger tips that caress the tufts
of pillows, an embrace of vacancy. She

scuffles with her heart cutting
paper dolls of itself, voluptuous
triangles in red velvet that clash
with the tweed of middle age, a broken
marriage, another dog-eared story
of unrequited love that she

reads before the same old
friends with briefcases rifle her
evening. Here is good vodka and
ice, cloth napkins, the etiquette
of coupled living. In the game
of charades, one more pantomime

of a disappointed quest. And leave her
at an empty table with a glass
that needs filling. In a tall cupboard
the dusty bottle, a rare wine
of good vintage that she has kept,
perhaps, for a bachelor
in his fifties who buys life
insurance for the bride he's never had.

THE RED HAired KID



Lois Metzger

My parents knew how to punish me: Whenever I did anything wrong, I was grounded. Small crimes met with small sentences. Once I told the old woman next door that I had been adopted. She asked sadly, "And your sister too, dear?" I said no. Weeks passed before she mentioned to my mother how "well-adjusted the boy seemed, considering the circumstances." I had to stay indoors every night for a week. Another time I stopped doing homework, and explained to my teachers that my home life was awful, "because of the divorce." When my parents heard that one, I stayed in for January. Sometimes I forgot whether I was home voluntarily or doing time. I had a calendar near my bed, and I crossed off each day with a large "X".

Four years ago I took my sister Amy to the city without permission; that got three months. I'd wanted to go roller skating in Central Park. We took the wrong train, and ended up in an unfamiliar part of the city (even now I'm not sure where we were, but I think I've passed it since, recognizing the place by a familiar dread). Amy started to cry, and I pretended to know where we were so she'd stop. "Oh yes, here's the old Loew's theatre, and that's the drug store!" I spoke quickly to calm myself, too. She wouldn't stop crying. "The rink's right around the corner, but all that walking has me pooped; I'm too tired to skate, aren't you?" We managed to get home all right: we took a cab. We were drained and unhappy in that cab. When we got to our apartment I had to run inside to get money, while Amy remained as hostage. Before I got out I said, as a joke, "See ya, kid. Be sure to write." Her face was red and puffy, and she looked at me with blood-shot eyes. Like an idiot I sat there, waiting for her to laugh.

That night my mother told me that Amy had known I was only bluffing, but that my pretense had scared her more. "She's only eleven," my mother said. Apparently I'd scared Amy out of her young mind. "You, her older brother . . ."

Behind my back, secretly, Amy had sneaked off and spilled it all. When my mother's sermon was over I ran into Amy's room. I found her sitting on her pillow, her back against the wall, reading. I grabbed the book out of her hands. "What'd you have to tell her that for?" I said. "Why'd you tell her I didn't know my way around, huh?"

"You lost my place," she said, pointing at the book.

I grabbed her hand. "Damn it, why couldn't you stop your damn sniveling then and confront me with it, well? Instead of telling her!"

"Stop yelling," she said, and tried to wrench her hand free.

"I'm not," I said, louder.

She jerked her arm and tightened her lips, indicating

that she'd talk if I'd let her go. I did. She said, "Well, what about you? Why didn't you just say, 'We're lost'? Would've been a whole lot easier, you saying, 'We're lost.'"

"But *we* weren't," I said quickly, without thinking. "You were lost maybe—" I was in too far to stop. "Not me. I know the whole damn city."

Whenever I imagined that afternoon, Amy repeating what I'd said to my mother, making me look like an idiot, I was sickened. She had no right; I had no defense. Surely there was something criminal in that.

In Jackson Heights there is a variety of unexciting apartment complex shapes: circles, squares, trapezoids; ours is an arc, with one large gray tree near its center. The brick apartments have either one, two or three bedrooms, identically furnished with dull brown cabinets and drawers, and straw-like tweed on the couches. When I look out my bedroom window I see my neighbor's kitchen window (she closes her blinds when she sees me); peering out the living room window, I see the snowy El tracks.

Behind those anonymous cabinets and drawers often I find empty gin and bourbon bottles. "The maid," my father says, winking, with his awful humor (we've never had a maid). My mother laments his expensive taste in liquor: "If only he liked that cheap wine," she says, in an awkward, miserable attempt at humor. Because of his drinking, my father sorely misinterprets everything. Once he found my mother crying, and stared at her blotchy cheeks. He said, "What's that you've got on your face there, some rouge?" and, thinking she was making up to go somewhere without him, he sulked. He caught Amy and me throwing things at each other, and commented how cute it was that we were playing together. He always forgets how old I am; I say, "Eighteen," and he says, "When did that happen?" then asks me again in a week.

On holidays and weekends he falls asleep at five in the afternoon, only to wake us at three A.M. by stomping to the kitchen to eat left-over meatloaf and cake. He gained forty pounds one year. His face is always spotted and rough. Anytime anybody asks a question he yells, "What?" Often he says "no" or "yes" directly afterward, so I know that he had actually heard. He never stands still. During a conversation he walks to my left, then back, then behind me. It always amazes me how certain actions seem ordinary simply because they are repeated. Whenever I watch that drunken dance of his, I can't imagine why I'm not in perpetual shock.

When I was fourteen my father stopped drinking for five weeks. It was as if my mother had re-married; here was a gentle, even timid man. He told me he used to write songs. One began, "I can do without the Brooklyn Dodgers, but I can't do without you." And he had a sense of humor. One afternoon he lifted a bottle of cooking wine to his lips, and said, "Don't tell your mother." I wasn't sure whether he was kidding, but then he laughed and said something like, don't I know a joke when I hear one? And he put the bottle down.

"Vic," he said, near the end of the five weeks, "there's something inscrutable about you. You're complicated."

LOIS METZGER has studied at SUNY-Buffalo and Johns Hopkins. She lives in NYC, and her work has appeared in Clarion, SF, and The New Boston Review.

"Thanks, if that's a compliment."

"Yes and no." He shrugged. "I'm forming some conclusions about you—but for now, I'm stumped."

"I trust you'll let me know what you come up with," I said, or something to that effect.

"Oh, sure!" Then he messed up my hair; he said he only did that when I seemed "stiff."

But he resumed drinking, and hasn't attempted to stop again. I miss him; I miss the person I knew for those five weeks. I don't think I disliked him before then. He should never have given me that glimpse.

When I complain about him to my mother she nods, agrees, and does nothing. She says now they are beyond conversation: "At least when we used to fight, we understood each other." On one hand, I think my mother's weak to have given up; on the other, I hardly blame her.

The worst thing about getting grounded was staying in that apartment when everybody was home. That was truly solitary confinement.

The sight of blood never disturbed Amy. She had weak gums as a kid, and every time she brushed her teeth she spat blood into the sink. If she lightly knocked her jaw in her sleep, in the morning she found a red stained pillow. One summer she went to camp, and horrified her bunkmates; her cheerful calmness saved her from eight weeks of taunts. She and I once saw, in the coming attractions before a movie, a woman running with blood on her face and neck; my head spun and I felt dizzy. Amy leaned toward me and said, "That looks so fake." I nodded, even though this woman's face seemed more real to me than my own sweaty hands. "Do you know they used ink in the old days?" Amy whispered. "In black and white films, ink passed for blood. Now *that* looked good." I could never figure out where Amy got all her facts; after all, we live in the same house, we ought to know the same things. I told Amy to keep quiet, we were in a movie theatre, not at home in front of the television. My reprimand brought on several harsh orders from the people behind us to keep still. I said to Amy, "Did you think we were that loud? I don't think we were. Some people'll complain anywhere."

I'd hoped she'd say, "Yeah, right," but she said, "*You* were loud! They came here to watch the movie; can't blame them, can you?"

That was Amy: *they* were always right.

Since we fought so much our parents bought us two of everything, when they could afford it. I can't think of any other reason to buy two Monopoly games, sets of magic markers, softballs. But we only had one sled. This was our fault, Amy's and mine; they offered to buy another when the next paycheck came in, but this sled was special. A kid down the block had scratched cartoons deep into the wood with a ball-point pen. The drawings were not terrific, but a month later that kid died in a car crash, and neither of us wanted to part with that sled. His hair had the same color of carrots, and he was rumored to have been smart, almost a genius. Neither Amy nor I knew him well.

I don't know why Amy had wanted a dog. She couldn't have been lonely; she had loads of friends. She talked to

them only behind closed doors; I'd hear muffled laughter, then Amy urging her friends to "Shh," as if their talks contained valued secrets. And it's not as if Amy needed responsibility; she had plenty to do in the house. But she begged and pleaded for a dog, and finally our parents allowed her to choose one from the city pound, which had a blundering euphemism for a title—Puppy Heaven. The dog was a mutt: dull beige like a terrier, with the stringy hair of a sheepdog. Amy loved him, maybe because he was her possession, or because the odd creature was so inept: he did not get along with any of his own kind. I imagine that in the language of dogs he behaved with inexcusable rudeness, because he often sent other dogs into snarling fits. Sir Flint (Amy chose that name, not I) was as surprised as anyone else at these outbursts, and he usually trembled, leaned against Amy, and cried. All this I found pathetic, but Amy only seemed to get more attached to him. Despite the dog's nervous disposition, she managed to train him well, and could even walk him without a leash.

But she could be a nasty, moody kid, particularly when her friends weren't visiting. Even when she was polite or generous, I sensed an undercurrent of disapproval and disgust at my presence.

Three winters ago, when I was fifteen and Amy was only twelve, I saw her trying to sneak out with the sled—it was a perfect sledding day, fresh snow and sunshine—and there she was, at nine A.M. (she usually sleeps until eleven on the weekends), quietly carrying the sled in her arms, her boots dangling by the laces in one hand, walking on tip-toe in her socks. She didn't know I was in the bathroom. I leaned against the door, cleared my throat, and spoke calmly to her curved back. "Pardon me. It's my sled, too."

She turned around, quickly drawing in breath. "I didn't want to wake you," she said suddenly.

"Bull."

"It's true."

"Bull."

Her face went through a routine transformation: first she tugged her lower lip with her teeth to show uneasiness, then she scowled. "So what do you want, huh? You want the sled? You can have it."

I opened my eyes wide. "Why don't we go together? Need I remind you again that it's *our* sled?"

Amy considered my proposition. "All right," she said. "Hurry up. I'm starting to sweat."

My father came out of his room, bleary-eyed. These early morning bathroom trips of his were common. "What's this?" he said.

"We're going sledding," Amy said, then added with sarcastic sweetness: "Together."

"Well, don't be so damn noisy about it next time," he said, and brushed me aside to get into the bathroom.

Amy and I both knew we had been quiet. I smiled, and decided to kid her a little. "It's all your fault. You had to scream and yell. Could wake the dead."

I expected her to laugh, but she said, "Shut up." I went into my room and, as I dressed, I realized my face was burning. I looked in the mirror, and I was red. Maybe Amy was going to tell my father that I was the noisy one,

that I should be punished and not allowed to go sledding. My hands shook. No, she wouldn't do that. But I listened carefully for a knock on my father's door. Maybe she wanted me shut up forever.

When we went outside, I breathed deeply and became calm. The cold fresh air seemed to cheer Amy up. I dragged the sled, and we headed for the small park only a few blocks away. Sir Flint followed, frantically wagging his tail and acting so ecstatic that Amy said she couldn't send him home.

My boots made bigger tracks in the snow than Amy's. Instead of sensibly following me she walked in a zig-zag path, almost hopping from one step to the next, the snow half-way to her knees. "Where's my hat, my hat!" she said, then laughed to find it inside her floppy hood. She had her hair tied tightly back in a rubber band. Her ears were bright red.

"Keep the hat on," I said. "You look like a clown."

Gazing directly at me with narrow, unblinking eyes, she slowly rounded a clump of snow and threw it at my jacket. It crumbled and fell.

"I'm glad you got that out of your system," I said. "Now let's go." I turned around and continued to walk, dragging the sled. Behind me I heard her frantic little jokes: "Yes sir! Right away, sir! At your disposal and attack dog ready!" As if Sir Flint understood, he gave an appropriate bark, then put his nose in the snow. Bits of it remained on his face; he looked idiotic.

"Do you think he's cold?" Amy always spoke tenderly when she referred to the dog. "Some dogs wear sweaters. You know those poodles. Do you think he needs one?"

"No. Dogs only shiver when their bones are right next to their thin skins. Look at all that hair; he's practically a wolf. You might've chosen a more dignified dog," I added.

"He's *part* wolf," Amy said proudly, missing my point. "The guy at Puppy Heaven told me that's why he suddenly stops eating, points, then looks around. He's guarding the pack."

The park was typical of Queens: tucked away behind the apartments and shopping centers, spanning a few city blocks, with several rows of trees and scattered bushes. We decided to go down the only long hill. None of the other sledders had tackled that route, so we were guaranteed a smooth ride. Apparently two other kids had contemplated it; their rear ends had left markings that looked like the prints of two giant thumbs.

Amy wanted to sit in back because that's the steering position, but my legs are too long to sit comfortably in front. Grudgingly she let me in back. Sir Flint took off at a furious pace; I guess he saw something more interesting than us.

I had my legs on either side of her. We went along easily and picked up speed. Amy said something like, "We're going fast—I can't move my foot." We almost hit a tree, and her shoulders tensed. I thought I'd give her a truly good scare and ride up close to a tree, then swerve past by inches. Amy muttered something I couldn't hear, so I leaned my chin on her shoulder: "What's that?" Suddenly her head shot back and hit me in the collar bone. I saw the tree, and then we smacked it. I heard the

crack of a sled plank, and a faint breathy noise from Amy. I was thrown onto my stomach and got a faceful of snow.

There was a hush in the trees. I glanced at Amy and saw her lying on her left side, with her head leaning at an odd angle against the tree. She was quiet. Her mouth hung open. There was some blood on her lips, and her lips moved with no sounds coming out, only a slight wheeze. Some of her hair was tossed across her forehead. Her hat was stuck to the tree. I peeled it off. I brushed her hair aside and carefully tucked it inside her hat.

I expected her at any second to leap at me with one of her ugly grins or insult me or start whining about something. The red on her lips looked awful.

I heard a familiar deep bark and saw a running beige dog in the distance; Sir Flint was returning from his romp. Amy's body was shaking, so I took off my jacket and sweater. I wrapped the sweater around her neck like a scarf. Kneeling with my back toward her, I lifted her right arm and leg. I stood up slowly, and slung her over my shoulders, wearing only a jacket over my bare chest.

I walked back in my own wind-smoothed footprints. Sir Flint ran around us in circles. Amy's left arm dangled and swung. Ahead, the trees looked so similar they seemed to stand in a line-up; one was further back, less conspicuous. I saw a gas station sign and headed in that direction.

Then I heard Amy say, "He's chasing sheep," and I thought she was dreaming, but soon after she said, "He's running in circles. Gets rid of the sheep." I realized she was talking about the dog, so I let her down.

"You're not hurt," I said, and put her on her feet. "If you were badly off I'd take you to a hospital, but you don't need it."

She swayed and looked at me, glassy-eyed. "What?"

I grabbed her shoulders to steady her. "Listen. You're fine. It's like it didn't happen almost."

She moaned, leaned down and spat blood. I kicked some snow over it. Her eyes looked wet and blood-shot as if she'd just awoke. Finally she said, "Do you know why he runs in circles?"

"It keeps the sheep away. How do you feel?"

She shrugged and put a gloved hand to her lip. "I don't know."

"You're fine," I said. "You look fine."

I took a few strides back, and motioned her to walk toward me. One of her ankles wobbled and she winced with each step. "You can walk," I said. She limped, but managed to walk by me.

She hung her head. "You had to leave the sled."

I nodded, but she wasn't looking at me, so I said, "Yeah."

"Maybe Dad won't remember that we went sledding," she said, almost mumbling. "Maybe he'll think we only took a walk." She shook her head; we both knew he'd remember.

When the wind blew hard I shivered. She still had my green sweater around her neck. Her shoulders looked stiff. "You're all hunched over," I said.

"I'm hunched?" she asked, intrigued. She smiled, and if it weren't for the dried blood, I almost wouldn't have noticed she was hurt. Then I saw the large blue

swelling on her cheek. "Just put me in that movie!" she said. "I'll stay in that tower! I'll ring that bell!"

She was going off into one of her silly moods, and we had business to discuss. "Listen. We'll say we went through the park, and you tripped over a dead tree."

"Okay." She walked funny, but maybe it was because of the snow.

"No, wait. That won't explain the thing on your face. Unless we say you fell on a rock."

"What thing on my—" she removed a glove, touched her cheek and laughed nervously. "I'm so numb I can't feel it."

It had gotten a lot colder. Amy's lips were blue.

"Say," she said suddenly, "we could tell them we got mugged! The crooks tied you to a tree, but they beat me up, and smashed the sled. We can't remember anything, in fact, the whole thing is a blur. They had stockings on their heads. Yeah! That way nobody's to blame."

I stopped walking. "Blame?"

She coughed. "Well. You know."

I stood in front of her, but kept my eyes on the top of her head, on her hair.

"Not *blame*," she said, "I mean, it's just quicker to say that than to explain the whole thing."

"Uh-huh," I said. "Quicker to explain a band of muggers than to say what really happened."

She turned red.

"Why wouldn't you tell them the whole thing?" I asked. I didn't trust her.

She looked all around, from the tops of the skeletal trees to the drifts and then at her own feet. She held her arms tight around her shoulders. "Well, I don't want Dad to start talking about taking Sir Flint back to the pound!"

I had no idea what she was saying. I put my hand on her arm. "Amy—"

"Well, if we start explaining how Sir Flint ran in front of the sled and caused us to crash, then he'd say the dog was downright destructive, now wouldn't he?" She talked so fast she spat several times into her foggy breath. She repeated, "Wouldn't he?"

Then I realized, with a kind of gentle shock, that Amy was terrified. This was not like getting lost in the city. For the first time in my life I imagined how she must've felt. Of course she wouldn't tell them. I was her brother. She was probably wondering how well she thought she had known me before.

I remember when she was a baby she changed expressions in a flash. She'd go from astonishment to confusion to joy, then start crying or something. Casually my mother called her a born actress. No one, not even my father during his brief visit, ever gave serious thought to how complicated Amy was.

"He'd say we'd have to get rid of him, send him back to the pound. Vic, they'll kill him! So we don't blame the dog, okay?"

We stood in a shaded area where stripes of sunshine hit the ground like searchlights. Amy looked at me, waiting. I could tell this one was all on my shoulders. Suddenly I remembered that kid who had both decorated and was haunting our sled. I came up with this story: Amy had insisted on sledding solo, and on her walk back up the hill,

wham! she was hit by another, larger sled, driven by an absent-minded red haired kid who didn't even stop to say he was sorry.

"Red hair. Right," Amy said. "And our sled split in half."

We walked to the gas station, and Amy went to the room marked Women. She twisted the knob and said dully, "It's locked." I went to the small office and didn't realize how out of breath I was until I said to the large attendant, "Can I have the key for the ladies' room?" He cocked a menacing eye and I said, "For my *sister*; she's been hurt, and she has to wash her face." I held my jacket tight around my collar, but he kept staring at my neck. I think he noticed I had no shirt on. He'd been adding a lot of numbers when I interrupted.

"Your sister," he said slowly. He took a pen from behind his ear and stuck it in his teeth. "Where's this sister?"

"There." I pointed a curved finger toward the back of the building.

"Let's see your sister," he said. I noticed the key marked Ladies on a metal hook, only inches away. I thought of grabbing it, running, and tossing it to Amy in a heroic gesture before the police carted me off in handcuffs. "Yes sir," I said, "right away."

Amy's head rested on the dirty wall. Part of her hair was smudged with soot. "Where's your hat!" I said.

"Lost it." She had her eyes closed. "When you carried me. I'm tired."

"Listen, Amy," I said, "the guy inside wants to talk to you. He thought it was odd that I wanted the key to the girl's room, so go in there and say something—anything—so he knows you're alive."

Amy breathed deeply. She walked evenly to the office. "May I have the key, please?"

He stopped scribbling and his jaw fell, exposing several layers of chin. "What happened to you?" He said it loudly, as if Amy's hearing might have been damaged.

She said in a monotone, "I fell off a sled hit by a red haired kid. I'm fine."

The man looked at her cheek and hair. He grabbed the key without breaking his gaze, and placed it in her cupped palm. She turned and he said, "Wait." He handed her a new bar of soap. The man looked at me with uneasy distrust as Amy left.

I was afraid he'd start a conversation, so I coughed into my gloves. Then I started to genuinely cough and couldn't stop; he asked me if I wanted some water and without thinking I said no. The tickling in my throat was unbearable; I broke off a chunk of snow and let it sit in my mouth until it melted. I stuck another, larger piece under my tongue. I'd never felt so cold, but after it dissolved my throat was better. Sir Flint stiffened and pointed, I followed his gaze; he stared only at the gas pump.

When Amy came back she wasn't holding my sweater. She tossed me the key. I was debating whether or not to mention my sweater. "You remember that time in the city?" I heard myself saying, "I didn't know where the hell we were. I was scared."

"Uh-huh," Amy said. She sounded like she needed sleep.

Intro 11

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AWP

"You shouldn't've told them what I said that day." She squinted. "Them?"

"Mom. You told Mom what I did, remember? She told Dad."

"Yeah," she said uneasily, as if she had forgotten the details, or else was too dazed to remember. She had washed off most of the blood, but I still saw some near her ears. "Listen," I said, "forget it. Just don't tell them anything anymore."

She nodded. "After today, you mean?"

"Yeah, right, after today." I put the keys on the office desk without meeting the man's steady glare and said, "We appreciate it. Thanks!"

Sir Flint didn't seem to mind the whistling freezing winds, but I felt cold to my bones. As we walked, Amy stopped dead in her tracks. "Hey wait!" she said. "I left your sweater in there."

"Don't worry," I said, still walking.

"No, really," she hopped to catch up with me, "I'll go back and get it. You want to wait for me here?"

"No," I said, "I don't want you talking to that guy again. He gave me the creeps."

I expected her to say, "People always give you the creeps," but she said, "I know; his left eye had a twitch, did you notice?"

I almost said, "yes," thinking she was trying to show me up, but I said, "No." We walked slowly and I took hold of her sleeve, not letting go for several blocks. I couldn't stop talking. I told her if she ever got close to our parents they'd disappoint her time and again. I told her how that apartment felt like jail. I suggested she move out first chance she got. She laughed; she was only twelve.

"Are you hungry?" I asked her. "We can go to a coffee shop for an hour."

"No, look, we're almost there."

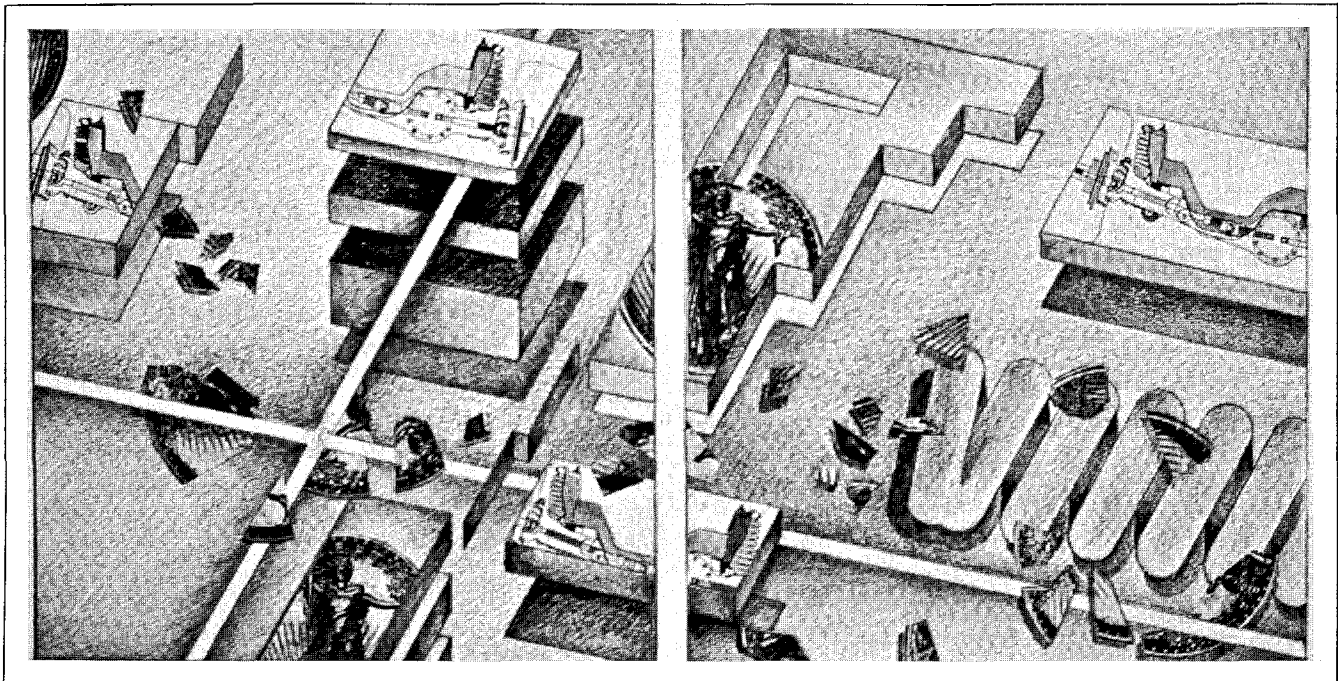
My mother was reasonable; she never asked what had happened. It hadn't occurred to me that if neither of us said anything, she would assume the obvious, that we'd had an accident. As a precaution she drove Amy to the hospital for X-rays. No bones were broken. My father, when he came home later, only shook his head at the news, and muttered something about carelessness. But he gave me money the next day to buy her a new woolen hat. Neither Amy nor I received any punishment, but I stayed home a lot anyway; Amy couldn't do much for a while.

We joked about it. Once Sir Flint knocked over a plant, and Amy said, "The red haired kid is at it again." I said it when I fell on the rug: "The red haired kid tripped me." That kid was responsible for bad weather and an epidemic of flu.

For several months Amy's ankle hurt when the air was damp. She denied the pain, but she couldn't run in the snow, or even walk quickly. I took out Sir Flint when the weather was foul. Sometimes my mother prodded me with, "You and Amy seem to have finally become friends," hoping I would supply an explanation. But I'd told Amy not to tell them anything; I remained silent, and so did Amy. Often my mother remarked to her neighbor how strange it was that we were quiet adolescents, considering how talkative we had been as children. □

David Sander

KLEIN MAKES THE ROUNDS



It wasn't so cold out; Klein walked.

Under his arm, his black briefcase, full of engraving proofs. In his pocket, a pack of business cards, with his name in red. He had straightened his tie, worn a new suit this morning, gotten a shine at the train station, and had carefully pared his fingernails with a pocketknife.

He was going to make the rounds of some advertising agencies.

Business was bad.

In fact, it was a good thing Eddie was sick, Klein thought. There wouldn't have been enough work; say, there wasn't enough work as it was. Poor fellow. Macherty and Drury were going over there now, on their lunch hour, to try and see him; and to give blood. Poor fellow. Well,

DAVID SANDER writes and paints in Chesterton, Indiana. His book, Wood Engraving: An Adventure in Printmaking, was published in 1978 by Viking.

maybe he would be better during the busy season. Klein would give him a ring in a few days and see how he was getting along.

There was an agency in the Wrigley Building he had planned to see for some time now. They didn't know him there, and his firm had never done any work for them; but in the Business section of the newspaper from time to time they announced new accounts, and he had read of how this agency had gotten the Blily Pop Corn account. Blily made pop corn machines for theatres and travelling outdoor shows, and their illustrations weren't first rate. Klein tried to remember their name . . .

He stood for a long time before the list of tenants, and it came to him: Powers and Clayton. Yes, that was it, Powers and Clayton. He had carried the name around in his head for many months now, and it came back to him. Funny, he thought as the elevator took him up, funny how many things you can carry around in your head. Except that you think of nothing else, he told himself. He sighed and shrugged a little, and stopped lest someone else in the elevator think he was talking to himself.

The agency door was very impressive: They had upholstered the four edges of the door in leather, white leather with gold studs; and the knob was shaped like a Moor's head, and painted black. It was quite impressive. Klein wiped the palm of his hand dry on his coat, felt in his pocket for a card, took a deep breath, and opened the door.

He walked to the receptionist, smiled, and handed her his card. "I'd like to see your art director, please." He stared at her. "Mr. Riley?" she asked. "Yes, yes, that's it; Riley. Ha ha ha." He smiled again. Riley Riley Riley, must remember that name. He heard the girl buzz Riley, and then she said "He'll see you in a minute, please."

Klein relaxed, and sat down on the new leather sofa. Must have cost them five thousand bucks, a layout like this. He looked only at the reception room.

Well, the worst was over. Riley, whoever he was, would see him. Now he would sell only on the samples in his briefcase. The girl said "You may go in now," and Klein got up, chilled with the prospect of meeting for the first time anyone who didn't know who he was and wasn't expecting him. Klein wiped his hand again on his coat, and went through the inner door. The receptionist pointed to an office, and Klein went in. "Ahem. Mr. Riley?" he said, smiling. He held out his hand.

"I'm O'Connor. Riley's in there," the man said. He pointed to the next cubicle.

Klein stammered a thank you and went out of O'Connor's cubicle and into the next one. A man was talking on the phone. Seeing Klein, he motioned him to a chair, the only other chair in the space. There was a box on the chair and some papers. Klein stood sweating, smiling, and waiting politely for Riley to get off the telephone.

Riley put his hand over the receiver and turned to Klein. "Make yourself comfortable," he said, and then said "Yeah?" into the receiver. Klein felt a drop of sweat leave his hairline and run down toward his nose. Since Riley had no idea of who Klein was, it was improper for Klein to take off his coat, and the sweat of excitement and the heat of the room bothered him. He stood first on one

leg, then on the other, waiting for Riley to finish talking, ready to smile. He began to relax.

Riley's office had an air of great impermanence. The temporary panels that subdivided the huge office space, the glass top half of the panels, the furniture of grey modern steel design, the new papercutter on top of a cut cabinet. Klein compared Riley's office with his own, and felt that his was far more stable, more secure, that somehow the office could hardly be wrenched out, were he and the company to disappear.

Riley, talking very fast now on the phone, assuring a client that the job would be at the press on schedule, seemed like such a temporary man, even if he was the art director. A misstep and he would be fired. A small wheel. A position, a job; and while the job was always kept, the man was not. Klein thought of a flock of small birds flitting in and out of a large wrenhouse. How secure his own job seemed in comparison. Thank god for the security of a job like his. Security, that is the force that impels men to seek their own employ, to become bosses, to own a store, a company, to work on their own time, to be able to build, to understand what was going on. It wasn't totally secure, no; but it was much more secure than working for someone else. To own a company was to be able to control your own destiny a little better than by working for someone else. Yes, even above and beyond making money out of it.

Riley hung up. He turned to the telephone with a wry grin and waved disparagingly at it. "Ahhhh!" he said, sharing an experience with Klein. "What's on your mind?"

Klein thrust out his card, which Riley read. "Klein, sir, the Klein Engraving Company. We are the makers of wood engravings in Chicago, and since—"

"Woodcuts, eh?" Riley said. Klein could see Riley immediately categorizing his process and his products into a much lower class, the class of tiny old-fashioned newspaper-stock hacked-up pictures that appear so often in farm magazines. "I haven't seen or heard of a woodcut in years. Well," Riley said, a tone of dismissal in his voice, "If we ever need any woodcuts, there's no reason why we shouldn't call on you—er, Klein. No reason at all."

"Just a moment, Mr. Riley," Klein remonstrated. "When you think of a woodcut, what do you think of?" He was already unzipping his briefcase.

"Well, a *woodcut*, I guess." Riley laughed a snort of uneasy laughter.

Klein pulled out a 6 × 8 inch proof Macherty had made years ago of three different views of a laundry iron, on a ruled background. "This?" Klein said, and smiled.

Riley took the proof and whistled. "No, my gosh, no," he said, and laughed again.

"Or this?" Klein showed him a beer bottle, beautifully shaded, eight inches high. "Or this or this or this?" Klein laid five or six proofs on the table, and Riley picked each one up and looked at it. He stared at all of them intently, trying to see—

"All made by hand." Klein said.

"By hand," Riley assented.

"Sec, each line cut by hand, the whole picture interpreted in lines."

"This is really something new" Riley said, impressed.

"Something old, Mr. Riley; they were making cuts by this process before you were born. All the old magazines were illustrated by it. Artists were talked of the length of the land for their woodcut ability. Ever heard of Timothy Cole?"

"Yes, was he a wood engraver?"

"Was he a wood engraver. Oh, boy, was he a wood engraver." Klein expostulated.

This was more like it. Klein was preaching now, taking the work of his shop and extending it for the world to see. The years of apprenticeship of his men, their careful training, now getting recognition. The process itself, unheard of recently by many art directors, now that the old timers were dead and gone; it was being recreated now, reheard of, known again. This was the kind of joy Klein lived for; making an art director see how beautiful certain effects were with woodcut line. It proved Klein's boyhood, Klein's own training; it justified the things that employers had told him when they wanted to take him into the trade. Today, talking to Riley, he was reinstating woodcuts as a fine art, as a genuine thing-in-itself, second to none. It was the last flourish, if only Klein knew it, of an already dying trumpeteer.

Riley was visibly impressed. He was a young man with a moustache and a cashmere short-sleeved sweater and a pack of cigarettes within easy reach of both hands; and this fine line technique, the presence of a groping man who was sincerely expounding the merits of a beautiful useful art—Riley was impressed. He was so impressed, in fact, that he was still talking to Klein when his girl knocked on the panel, smiled sweetly to apologize for the interruption, and informed Riley that his appointment with the Advertising Circle was five minutes ago.

"Holy smoke," Riley said. He looked at his watch, and pulled on his coat. "Lunch, really," Riley said. "A group of—say, why not?"

"Why not what?" Klein said.

"Have you had lunch yet?" Riley said.

"N-no."

"Got some time?"

Klein nodded.

"Come on, then. Take your briefcase."

They hurried out of the office, two men bent on a very important mission, holding doors for one another, and smiling as they stood silent in the elevator going down. In the lobby, Riley said, "Group of art directors I eat lunch with once a week, just sit around and talk. Private dining room. Lots of fun. I'm sure they'll be interested in woodcuts. You're my guest." They went into the Wrigley Building restaurant and through a door and into a small private dining room. A table shaped like a U, and twelve men sitting at it in various stages of eating. Most had their coats off, and were eating in their vests. A boisterous Hello George greeted Riley as they came in. He introduced Klein as his guest, in the wood engraving business, and they both sat down and ordered corned beef and cabbage when the waiter came around. From time to time as they ate, Riley winked at Klein, and Klein smiled.

Klein was very jovial. He was extremely nervous, being among all these young college-types. He found it difficult to answer questions plainly, so he was very jovial.

In a good year, he probably made more money than the best of them.

"Wood engraving, eh?" A man across the table.

"Yeh heh heh s," Klein said, "that's right."

"Now what is wood engraving again?" another youngish man said. He sounded as though he had heard of it in school, and never seen it since.

Klein reached into his briefcase and came up with a handful of proofs. "Just happened to have these with me," he said loudly, and laughed at his own joke. Riley laughed too. Everybody laughed. The crowd was feeling very good. They passed the proofs around while they ate dessert, and commented on them. "Say," they said, "these are good." "Damn right they are," Riley would say. He was feeling proud of his guest.

"How do they make these?" a man across from Riley asked.

Klein explained the process.

"You don't say. Right on the wood, eh?"

Another man asked the next standard question: "How do they get such fine lines?" and added, "I'd go blind."

Ha ha ha, that was a good one.

Klein explained how wood engraving was no strain on the eyes at all, that it was, in fact, very enjoyable work, and that the men of his shop were, so to speak, one big happy family.

The art directors nodded their approval of such a shop.

Klein said, "If you're really interested, I'll show you something I did myself." They were very interested. Klein passed around a proof, holding it by the edges carefully, of a pastoral scene, 4 x 5 inches, that he had made in 1910 the year after he finished his apprenticeship at Nelson's. A flock of sheep munching grass on a wide meadow, and the shepherd asleep under a tree. The art directors expressed great admiration.

Klein stayed for an hour talking to them. When they left, they said it was the most informative and enjoyable lunch they'd had in a long time. Klein went through the history of wood engraving, the artistic importance of wood engraving, the usefulness of wood engraving, the possibilities of wood engraving, and, in answer to questions, explained other points about the process.

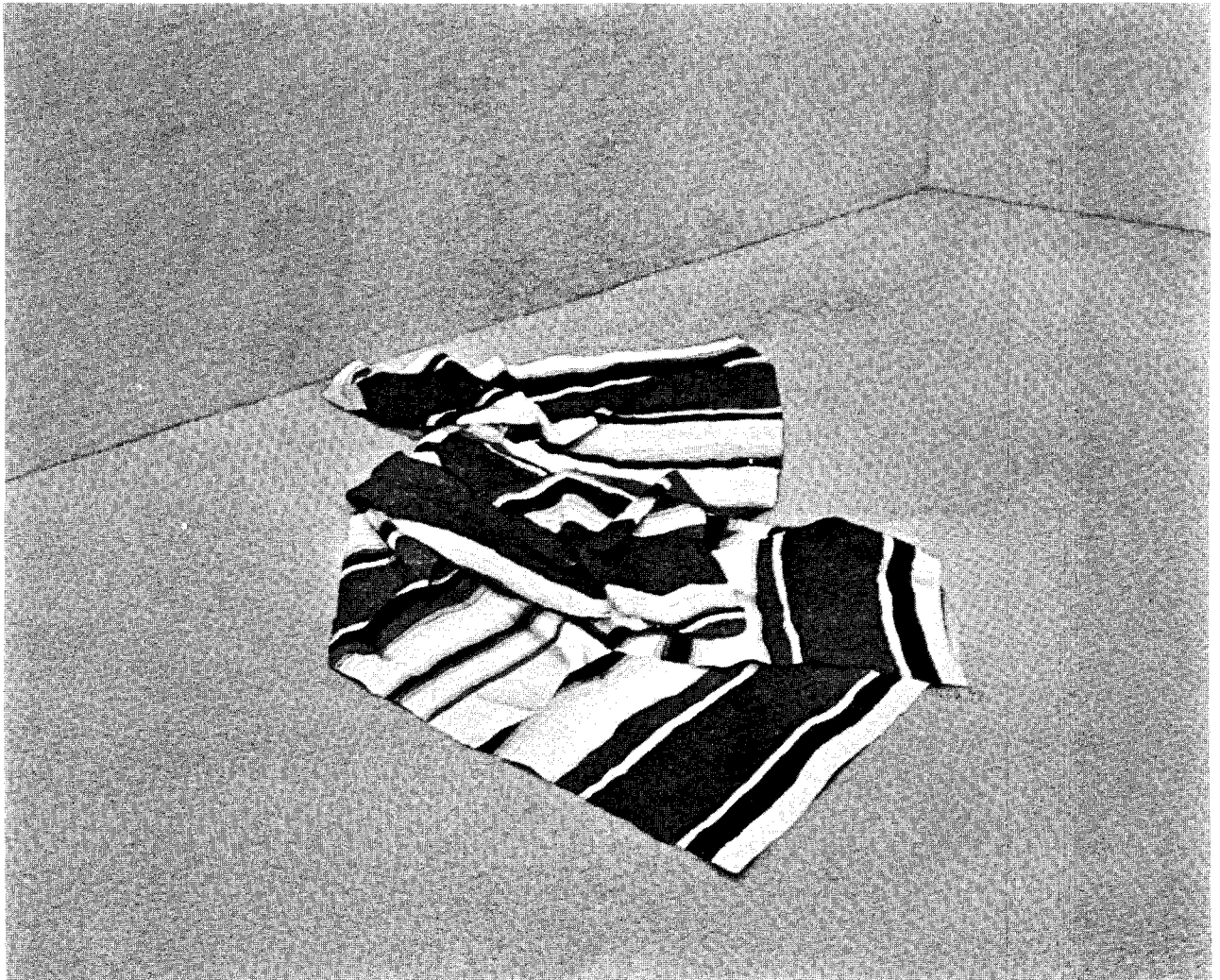
"You must be very proud," one man said, shaking his hand as they left, "Very proud indeed to be the only one left carrying on the tradition, and all that." Klein accepted the compliment gracefully.

And, out on the street, walking back to the shop with his briefcase, Klein glowed with happiness, with triumph, with a real feeling of satisfaction that his life, his goals, his plans, his ambitions, all were true. The things he had told his apprentices with a certain justification (since they had been, years before, told to him), these same things he had told to a group of college men in the advertising business, and had gotten away with it. Then they must be true. Then the things he said must be right. Then he should be proud of his work, his training of the men, of his field. Then life was, after all, worth living.

He looked in his pocket. There was enough change for carfare. He took a bus back to the office, and hoped there would be something on his desk from the afternoon mail. □

"If words have lost their meaning, why not look for meaning in silence?"
—*Octavio Paz*

Matt Cohen
A LOVE FOR THE INFINITE



He is lying on his back.

His skin is cold, his feet are beginning to go clammy in the thick insulated boots, and his hands are clenched to themselves. But he can feel the warmth of the golden-pear sky flowing through him and as he senses this special warmth in his blood, he begins to match the steady rhythm of his heart to the slower beat of the changing season.

His head is cradled in dead golden leaves. Crisp and yellow they curl around the tendrils of his hair, poke their waxy corners into the warm secret creases of his ears.

Soon it is not only his heart that is contracting and expanding, but the whole earth that is pulsing with it. And as he is lying on his back and looking into the splintered yellow rooms of the sky he feels the solid thumping of his heart coming not from himself but from thousands of miles under the ground, each beat starting at the absolute center of the planet.

He closes his eyes and the sun only shines brighter.

He sees himself lying on the yellowed poplar leaves, the hot gold truth of the sun exploding inside him, leaking gently from his eyes and ears and nose, gold waxy truth leaking out of him until finally he is covered in it, a softly ossified gold wax dummy lying on the autumn ground, soaking up the last October sun.

He wakes up and it is night. The sky is deep black, dotted with billions of carelessly burning stars. He wipes the gold from his eyes, digs it out from his nose and ears, unstops his mouth.

He stands up, brushing grass and leaves from his clothes.

He is conscious of the drug now. He stretches, trying to make his bones go into place. He can feel where they have been bent out of shape by muscles tense and twisted, by years spent hunched over a desk, by the steel-sprung exercisers he used to flex as a boy, trying to develop shoulders in the places where his older brother's sweater crumpled in on itself.

Now he is older than Michael was then, older even than Michael had been when he died. What if he too had died? There had been a time, earlier in the day, when he was afraid that the drug might kill him, that the same demon that had snatched away Michael might have gotten to him too, made him take an overdose, miscalculate the strength of his body. There had been a period of fighting the fear, and then he had finally given in to it. But it hadn't mattered; he had collapsed onto the ground and been drawn into the yellow leaves by a power that was indifferent to his fear, to his dead older brother, even to himself.

He pushed his fingers through his hair. Stretched and stamped his feet on the ground. The night air was cool and

MATT COHEN is a Canadian whose novels include The Disinherited and The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone (McClelland & Stewart).

beautiful. He could feel it blowing through him, caressing his skin and then passing right through it, refreshing his compromised bones, his exhausted muscles, the canals that faithfully carried his faithful blood.

He began walking down the hill and through the scattered trees that would take him to the trail. In the afternoon he had thought he was lost, that he was dying and lost, but now the landscape was utterly familiar, every curve and canyon of the rough ground known.

When he hit the old logging road his shoes scuffed in the gravel. This is the life, he said to himself. What I should really do is live here. I should build a fire to keep me warm, and in the morning start cutting down trees to make myself a cabin.

At this thought he stopped beside a poplar. Through its black night leaves he could see thick rivers of stars. He slapped the trunk with his open hand. The bark was smooth and cold against his palm, and the leaves hissed. With both hands he grasped the trunk and tried to shake it. The tree stood firm. Finally, his whole body involved, he got the poplar slowly waving back and forth, its upper branches moving in faster counter-rhythms, the leaves twisting and turning in the cold air.

Then he stopped.

The papery whisper of the leaves gradually died away and he could hear the wind again breathing through the trees.

An hour later he was in his car, listening to the happy murmur of the tires as they carried him south.

He was standing up.

In the mirror he saw a reflection of himself: a thin, middle-aged man, his hands awkwardly twisted as he knotted his tie.

"We need ice. And did you feed the dog? We need more tonic water too, you'll have to make a trip to the store." His wife's voice.

"I'll just finish here." His voice.

At the store, the 7-11 convenience store, everything is lined up in neat little rows. It is convenient, he tells himself; it truly is convenient. Outside he feeds quarters into a machine and is scarcely able to believe his luck when a plastic bag of ice cubes comes bubbling out.

It is only as he is walking to his car, one arm wrapped around a bag filled with cans of dog food and tonic water, the other carrying the plastic ice-bag, that he notices it is snowing. A flake falls in his eye and melts there; and the sudden sensation of snow melting into water, and the warm water running down his cheek, reminds him of when he was lying in the leaves and his eyes ran gold.

City lights diffuse in the skeined snow clouds. No stars show. He sits in the car and remembers how it felt to be driving when the drug was still running through him and he could feel the motor meshing in his brain, could somehow match up the pumping pistons and exploding cylinders with the memories of grade eleven physics and the time he and Michael stuck four giant firecrackers up the exhaust pipe of his uncle's rusted pickup truck and blew its muffler right through the weak back wall of the wood shed.

By the time he gets home the snow has already stopped. And in his absence the first guests have arrived. Soon he finds himself almost drunk. Then, in a long unnoticed leap, the party has narrowed down to a little corner of the living room where a woman is insistently telling him something.

"I really understand you," she is saying. "God knows, you're not an easy man to read, you know what I mean, in your case you have to read between the lines and to tell the truth I used to wonder if there was anything there—"she laughs at her own joke, because he's not going to, and leans closer, "but there it is, you've got something but you just don't want to let go." Her name is Mary, Mary McCallum right now but it used to be Mary Samuels and before that it was something else, and before that something else again; this Mary whoever was once his older brother's wife—"I owe it all to you" Michael's suicide note had read—and she had left him to marry the next in line. On that night Michael, in a manner which did not bear thinking about, had terminated his own existence. Ducked the donkey, kicked the bucket, blown his brains to Kalamazoo.

"What you've got," Mary was saying, "what you've got is what Michael never had, God bless him, though he ate his guts out for it, you know that? He did because you've got soul, dear ex-brother-in-law, dear honest-to-God 100% polyunsaturated soul, forgive me, but you're too fucking timid to show it to anyone. You know what I mean?"

She had him pushed against the wall of his own living room and the truth was that although he was partly concentrating on what she was saying, he was also thinking that it was awfully unfair to be delivered this drunken obscene lecture by the multi-married Mary right in his very own living room, pressed against the plaster he himself had so very carefully painted only one summer ago. One coat of primer and two coats of white.

"Well?" she asked. "Don't you have anything to say for yourself?"

"You're a great old-fashioned woman, Mary. You really know how to make a man feel important."

She laughed. "Don't be shy now. Tell me what you really think. You *know* you're good, don't you, you just *know* it."

"No. As a matter of fact I don't."

"You kill me," Mary said. "Did I ever tell you that? You really kill me." She leaned closer. "I'll sell your house for you," she said. "You know what? I make more money selling a house than you do from one of your lousy little books. I mean you can *read* them, young brother, but you can't live in them." She laughed again. "Sorry. I'm pretty funny tonight."

He was enclosed by the sleeping house.

Wearing his bathrobe, smoking a last cigarette, he walked around the downstairs, picking up stray ashtrays and glasses that had somehow missed the first round of cleaning-up. As he walked he listened, from old habit, to the sounds of the motors switching on and off.

Michael had taught him about the motors, about the

secret animals that made them go. The furnace, for example, he claimed the furnace was powered by the same Chinese moth who had built the Great Wall. This he had discovered when he found an empty green-tea box on the basement floor beside the oil tank. The refrigerator, on the other hand, was kept cool by the efforts of a thousand guppies who swam endlessly, breeding and reproducing in the freezer compartment.

There were two children and when he had finished listening to the motors he listened for the sounds of the children's breathing. He had developed, when they were younger, the habit of waking up in the middle of the night to be sure they were still alive; and although he prided himself on being cured, he still spent part of every late-night wander in the hall, standing with his arms folded across his chest, listening for their breathing, and hearing with it the breathing of his wife, deeper and stronger, laid beneath the children like a deep secure carpet.

Michael had taught him that: the listening. When they were children he and Michael had shared a room and they had a special game. On certain nights, by pre-arrangement or surprise, he would wake up very late and Michael would be gone. In the delicious and terrifying secrecy of the dark, their actual parents asleep while they, the children, were totally awake, he would creep about the house looking for Michael. "You have to promise," Michael would say, "you have to promise to find me. Will you?"

"Yes."

Solemnly they would shake hands on it, agreed: their secret pact.

And then finally, when to giggles and terror Michael was discovered behind some huge and bearlike piece of furniture, they would prowl around the house together, using stolen matches to light their way, until they found the kitchen. Where they would open the refrigerator and, dazzled by its sudden yellow light, they would with great stealth and subtlety steal just a little bit of food to carry back to their beds.

When he had started taking the drug he had tried to conjure Michael up, had tried to convince himself that somewhere out in the God-knows-what ether and spirit world Michael was still findable, still hidden away in some corner waiting to be discovered.

There were the sounds of his family's breathing. There were the sounds of the motors. It was ridiculous to have machines heating and cooling different parts of the house; his life, he thought, would be so much simpler if he could take his Chinese moth north with him to the place where the leaves fell gold and waxy and the earth thumped in time to the beating of his heart.

His own footsteps were silent.

He moved through the halls carefully, bare feet sinking into the carpet, a ghost in his own house.

Upstairs the breathing sounds grew thicker. His children, who shared a room, seemed almost to be choking, and, as he crept inside to kneel between their beds, he had the sudden sense of interfering with their dreams.

The oldest—his name was Michael after his brother—turned swiftly in his sleep, pursued or pursuing it was impossible to tell. And then, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, his eyes opened.

The man was kneeling beside his son's bed and when he saw his son's eyes open he had a great and unstoppable urge to clasp his hand over his son's face. And then the boy's eyes closed and he was sleeping again.

He was walking through the snow.

It was a grey slashing snow that cut into his forehead, sealed up his eyes, tried to find its way into the scarf he had wound around the lower part of his face.

He didn't know what time it was, but the grey light of the past few hours had taken on the faintest tinge of pink, as if to announce that somewhere the sun was setting as usual.

When he had left his house, it was still dark. To the sound of the motors and the breathing he had walked slowly down the carpeted stairs, then gone through the kitchen to the basement. There he had found his outdoor clothes and, after very slowly putting them on, he had let himself out the side door into the driveway where the car was parked.

The snow had started slow, the flakes gently floating to the windshield where they immediately melted. But then as the city was first one, then two hours behind, the pace picked up; and by the time he had turned off the main highway onto the twisting maze of roads that led to the old logging trail, the first snow of the season had become a small blizzard; and what should have been a bright morning sun was just a diffuse yellow presence.

At first he had stayed in the car, unwilling to go out into the storm. With the motor running and the air warm and stuffy he had drifted into a series of dozing sleeps, interrupted only by brief moments of looking out into the grey curtain of snow. And then finally, groggy and stiff, he had wrapped himself up and forced his way out of the car.

He was dressed almost entirely in his brother's clothes—because it was only after Michael died that he had begun to share what had been his interests—and in some gruesome act of respect, superstition, or just morbid remembrance, he had decided to disguise himself as Michael on these trips north. Around his face he had even wrapped his brother's old scarf, a musty plaid flannel.

He was dressed as Michael, he was remembering him. But this time there was no drug to warm him, no chemical inner sun to guide him safely through the weather.

He breathed in the cold air and it was like a slap to his insides. Only a few days ago the sun had run warm and waxy in the poplar leaves; but now most of the leaves were on the ground, covered with snow. The few that remained on the trees were dark and brittle, like sour old men determined to outwait the coming winter.

He was lying in the snow.

The car was hours and miles away.

Michael had killed himself but, so what? Was he obliged to follow him?

He was wearing Michael's warmest coat, a sheepskin coat with woolly lining and a huge collar that he had turned up to protect his ears; and as he lay in the snow,

trying to feel the frozen ground gradually work its way through to freezing him, he was asking himself why Michael's death preyed on him so.

After all, he had not neglected Michael while he was still alive. Responding to an endless litany of late-night telephone calls and dense scrambled letters, he had continually been the one to rescue Michael—from hospital beds, unpaid charge cards and parking tickets, mistresses who had outlived his short attention span, two drug overdoses that might have been botched suicides.

"You should try to straighten out," he once said to Michael.

"Why?"

"You're ruining your life."

"You live the life. You've got a career, a family, a book to write. You live the life and I'll do the fringe things, take the chances."

"For Christ's sake, Michael, you've got the same life I do—career, talent; you're the one with the talent, the boy genius. Your wife—"

"Mary? Oh no, mister, that's no wife, that's a—I don't know." Michael laughed, the way he did when it was supposed to be a joke but it was really just a little shout of pain that he couldn't keep down. He was silent for a few moments. That was after one of the drug overdoses, and he was in bed, his own bed at home.

"You could try again with someone else, Michael. Trust someone. Just because with Mary—"

"Just because," Michael repeated sarcastically. "No, it's not just because of Mary. Nothing is just because of anything." And then he smiled, that sudden sweet boy's smile that told you he had only been hiding, it had only been an elaborate joke with a sweet forgiving smile at the end. "You know what Baudelaire said?" Michael asked. "He said that the attraction of drugs is a sign of our love for the infinite. How do you feel about the infinite?"

The infinite was making him cold.

He stood up and brushed his clothes clean. He took his hands out of Michael's sheepskin gloves and slapped them together, rubbed vigorously against his nose, trying to make it feel something.

Then he stood without moving, facing north. North must be where Michael was. The wind blew up briefly, whistling sardonically, like one of Michael's fake laughs.

"Michael," he shouted. "Michael, where are you?"

Then he turned his back to the wind and began walking again.

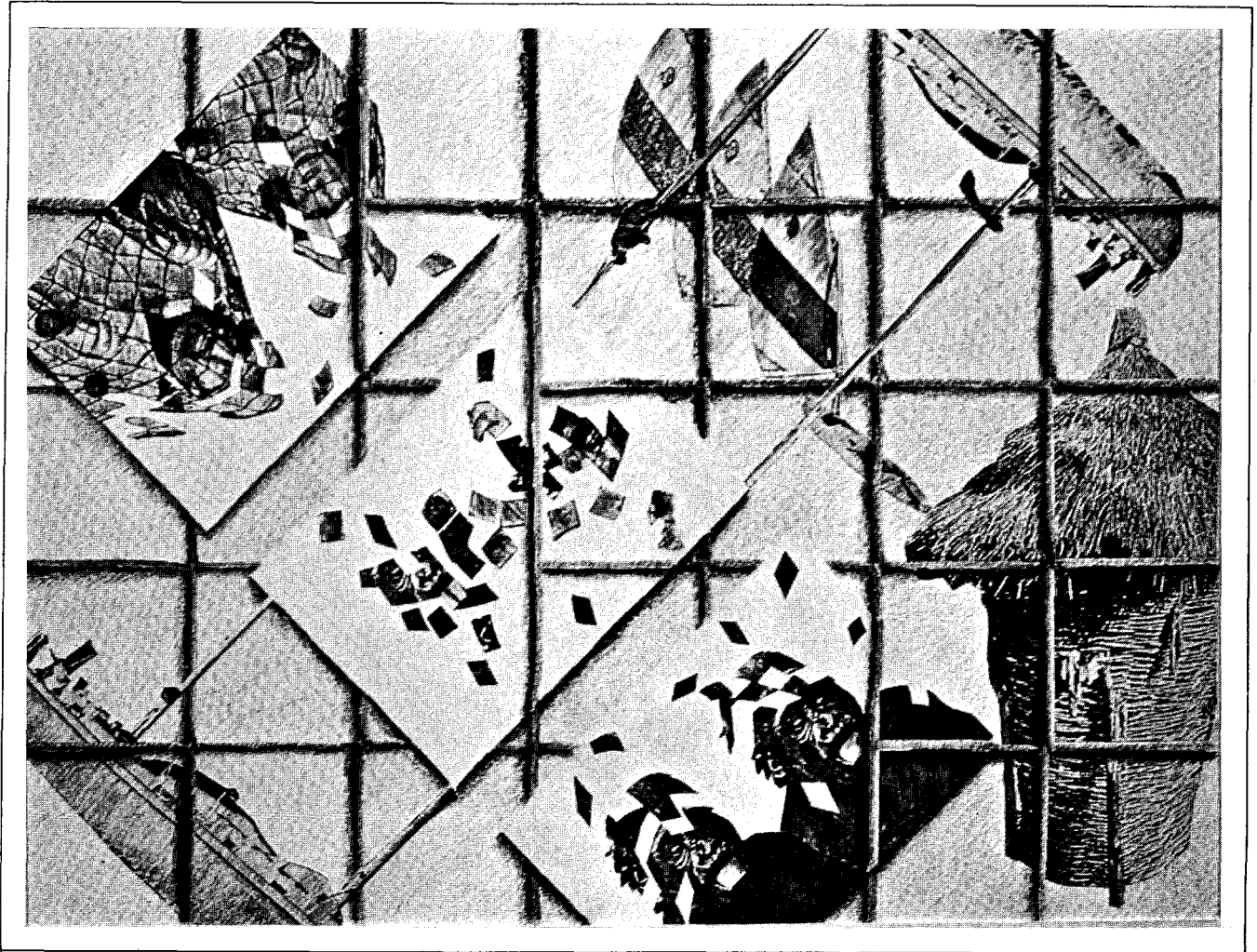
It was hours since he had left the car, and the land which had been so known to him only a few days ago now seemed utterly unfamiliar. With his eyes closed against the hurt of the cold he let his feet make the search for the old logging trail that would take him to his car.

In the spring, they found him.

Wolves had torn apart the sheepskin coat, and the plaid scarf was wrapped around a nearby poplar. But the skeleton, surprisingly, was intact.

The car door was open and a month of rain had rusted the key into the ignition; it looked like a metal hand waiting for someone to shake it. □

HURDY-GURDY



Daniel Lusk

The man was adrift on his life. It had been this way for as long as he could remember. Now it was surely worse. He stared out his window at the changing shadows in the air shaft. Across from him and one story up an asparagus fern pushed against the brown window. Meanwhile the shadow of the fire escape grew longer.

The man was divorced from his wife a year ago. He had felt then that something must change. There was little over which he had any control. But the marriage, that was perhaps something he could change, if he were not so faint-hearted. One day he mentioned it to his wife in passing. The wife assented immediately, before he even asked. She had sighed a great sigh of *ennui*, said what difference would it make, and yes.

He could not remember what he felt then, except that would be something changed. But nothing was. They had never talked to each other anyway. Now, he didn't see her either. If anything, he had grown even more faint-hearted. A twitch appeared just beneath his right eye. Otherwise, nothing was changed.

Today, on account of some mix-up in the schedules, he had been given a day off. He thought he would rest, take a walk in the park, read an article. But he had waked to a feeling of alienation and vagueness. Perhaps he should have some other job, he thought. Something different. But he had not the heart to look for one. He knew he would not return to his former place. What did it matter after all? He would not be missed. Now, with the shadow of the fire escape stretching like harp strings, he wished vaguely that it might rain so he would have to search for his transparent rain coat and go out to buy an umbrella. He had never had an umbrella. And it would be something to do. It was, however, not raining. The sky, he could see reflected in the upper windows of the warehouse next door, was vaguely flannel-colored.

We are free, he said to himself. And he took his jacket from the hook by the door and went out.

On the street, a woman with a tissue in her hand and a dog on a leash took no notice of him as he went along the walk. Nor did the brace of school children who passed him on either side with their school bags. A mother in a third-story window argued loudly with her daughter below on the sidewalk.

The man passed a vacant laundromat behind an iron folding gate. Inside another shop, piled high with flimsy boxes, he could see someone bent over a stack of invoices. The shop door was bolted, but as the man turned away, the shopkeeper came to the door, slid the bolt, and opened the door slightly. He went in then, and the shopkeeper bolted the door again.

The little store was filled with stacks of flimsy shirt

cartons. All the aisles. And on the walls, racks of suits. Black, gray, brown.

Excuse me, the shopkeeper said, I got mugged. Now I come back to work, no time to put everything away.

The shop was full of the gray boxes.

You want shirts; I got shirts, the shopkeeper said. He took the lid off a carton. Gray shirts inside. Another one. Blue button-down. I got all kinds of shirts, the shop man said, opening one after another of the gray boxes. He thrust one into the man's hands. Then he went out into the back room and came back with another three cartons of shirts and opened them.

I still got this scar, he said, fumbling with another carton. And I don't feel so good. The shopkeeper looked at the man, standing in the crowded shop with a gray shirt carton in his hands. You see something you want? he asked.

The man looked at the carton of shirts in his hands. The top one was his size. He paid for it and left the shop. The shopkeeper stood bolting the door behind him.

The man moved on up the street. Past the tailor shop, closed for business. A monkey approached him with a tin cup. It wore a collar, fastened to a chain. The chain led to an old-fashioned hurdy-gurdy that lay on its side in the empty doorway. The man took a few cents from his pocket and put them into the monkey's cup. He did not see the hurdy-gurdy man. The hurdy-gurdy was a beautiful instrument, like something from his childhood.

The man continued up the street, a few more shops. Then, having no particular reason for going on that way, he turned back, retracing his steps until he stood once more watching the monkey, who neither danced nor clowned but simply worked the passersby in a direct businesslike fashion. The hurdy-gurdy man still had not returned. The man stared at the instrument lying inert in the doorway of the tailor's shop. It was a very old hurdy-gurdy, its lively paint worn away in places, doubtless by the hands of a dozen generations of hurdy-gurdy men. A woman towing a child came toward the monkey, and the child stretched out its free hand. But the monkey drew back his cup and passed them by disdainfully.

There were fewer people now. The shirt shopkeeper locked his store and climbed hurriedly into a cab at the curb. And still the hurdy-gurdy man had not come back. Where could he have gone so late in the day? Surely he must come back soon and claim his musical instrument and resume his faithful monkey. These were the thoughts of the man as he stood watching. The light of day had grown dull as it does often toward evening. A policeman came along, and the man turned to go on his way.

You'll have to move along now, the policeman said to him. The man looked at the policeman, who gestured with his nightstick toward the monkey alone there in the middle of the sidewalk by the empty shops. The man cleared his throat. He would explain to the policeman that it was not his monkey. We, he began. But what if the policeman thought that he was lying? How could he explain about the missing hurdy-gurdy man? And if the policeman believed him, then what would be done with the monkey? It might be taken away to someplace unpleasant. So he cut himself short.

DANIEL LUSK is a poet and novelist living in eastern Pennsylvania. His first novel, O, Rosie, was published last year by Carpenter Press.

Awkwardly, for he had never before held a hurdy-gurdy, he gathered the old instrument into his arms, and cradling it as familiarly as he could manage, he went along the street, the monkey trailing him at the end of the chain, holding its cup of coins, toward his rooms.

During the night the man scarcely slept. He had made a little bed for the monkey on the sofa, the dark old hurdy-gurdy placed on the floor nearby so perhaps the monkey might feel at home with this familiar object. But he had not been in his own bed long before he felt the monkey's slight weight at the foot of his bed, lying against his feet on the blankets. He lay awake a long time, feeling these events wash over him. Once the monkey snored loudly. The man moved his feet gently, almost certain that he was right in doing so, and before long it had resumed its quiet sleep.

In the morning the man took up the hurdy-gurdy in his arms, and with the monkey trailing him as before, went back through the streets toward the shops. The woman with the tissue in her hand shortened her dog's leash as they came along, and stared after them. And when they finally reached the tailor's shop, he put the hurdy-gurdy carefully in the very place he had found it, and stood back to watch.

When he was certain the monkey would resume his soliciting of passersby, the man left it there, going past the shirt shop with the old shopkeeper standing over his invoices among the stacks of boxes. At the corner, he bought a cigar and a newspaper. Already he felt better having taken care of things in this adequate way. Surely the man who owned the hurdy-gurdy had only been delayed yesterday. He would come back, and that would be the end of it. A brief episode. Perhaps, he thought to himself, the hurdy-gurdy man had been detained in some unexpected way. He thought perhaps he even saw him, an odd, dark little man passing with a worried face. But as he looked after him, the dark man got onto a bus, so he went on. Today, he thought aloud, the man who owns the hurdy-gurdy will come looking to find his poor monkey, and will find him there in the same place, well-cared-for and none the worse for the brief night of his neglect.

With these thoughts and others, the day passed quickly. The west side of the street fell dim with shadow. It grew late, and being nearby, the man went to the corner by the tailor's shop.

As he came along, he imagined he heard music. But it was only the voices of some children from the Hebrew school in their yarmulkes. The money was holding his cup to a tall businessman, who produced a coin from his pocket and placed it in the cup. The man slowed his pace then, pretending disinterest. But the monkey came up to him and put the cup into his hands. The man thrust it back at the monkey, and when the monkey took it, confused, the man drew out a coin of his own and put it into the cup. He had seen the policeman coming along. Somehow the man felt sure he would be misunderstood for his part in this. Still there was no hurdy-gurdy man. And though he was standing off by the curb, affecting an air of detachment, when the policeman spoke he knew it was to him. Yes, move along now. That was all he said.

The man looked up and down the street for the missing hurdy-gurdy man. Then gathered once again the hurdy-gurdy into his arms. And followed as before by the monkey on his chain, he went home.

The next few days were much the same. The man left home each morning with the hurdy-gurdy in his arms, followed closely by the monkey, and went to the doorway by the tailor's shop. Each morning the woman with the white tissue stood beside her little dog and stared after. The woman in the window and her daughter on the street stopped shouting in mid-conversation so that there was a little riff of silence there below the window as he passed. And he carried the beautiful hurdy-gurdy easily in his arms, for it had grown light as old age to him. Sometimes the monkey would ride on the man's shoulder, leaning casually on his head. The man thought about his life. About his wife and his job. This certainly was a change. But it would end. He had begun to think the hurdy-gurdy man had been taken ill. He would come back, no doubt, perhaps today, and would find his monkey and his hurdy-gurdy just as he'd had to leave them. He'd resume his old life. That's how it would be, the man thought to himself.

He left the monkey in the usual place. And waved through the door to the man inside the shirt shop. Today his heart was like the heart of a man on vacation. He passed the fruit stand with old people squeezing the bright-colored fruit. The haberdasher's boy shouted at him to get out of the way of his cart of new suits.

Excuse me, he said, smiling at the boy's harried voice.

At the newsstand he bought himself a newspaper and a fine thirty-cent cigar. He had done right to leave the office where he would not be missed. He thought what his wife would think of him now if she could see him.

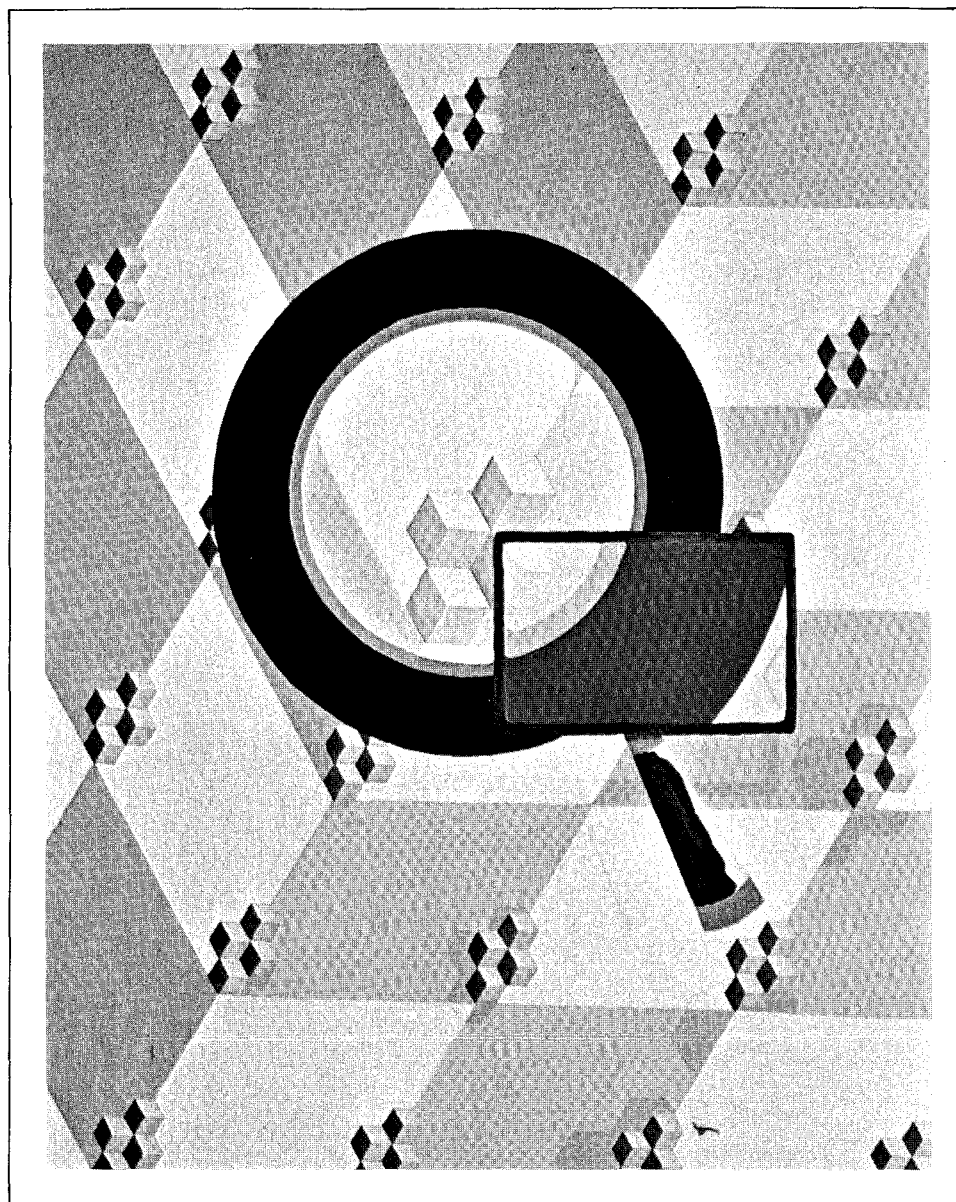
All day he went about with these thoughts and others like them. He read the newspaper and gave it to a worn woman with two shopping bags. He smoked slowly, savoring his fine cigar. And by the time the shadows had crept into all the doorways on the west side of the street, he had known a fine day. He was at ease, and even the vagueness to which he had grown accustomed did not seem such a burden on his head.

It was in fact still early afternoon when he came again to the tailor's shop where the monkey was working efficiently with his cup. For a while he stood watching, now and then eyeing the stub end of his fine cigar. The hurdy-gurdy lay precious and old in the tailor's doorway. Placed ever-so-carefully so as not to disturb the worn wooden handle of its ancient crank.

The man watched the monkey. Such a gentleman, the way he charmed his clients with his directness on the busy street. And how easily he worked within the length of his chain. How comfortably. So that he never moved or disturbed the fine old hurdy-gurdy lying there in the doorway, its worn music box like the container of some old magic, the mysteries of two hundred years of hurdy-gurdy men turning the wooden handle to make that curious music occur again. Music strange and infectious as the ancient symbols painted on the outside of the wonderful box. □

Mark Halliday

INSPECTOR HOLBEH'S CASEBOOK



The Case of the Countless Cups

One winter day Inspector Hob Holbeh was taking a vacation from the Big One, or trying to. He thought he would simply let some hours pass and hear what various people had to say, and feel the flow, more or less. He joined his colleague Mildew Socket for breakfast at Lum's and was able to enjoy the hashed browns more than ever before; they were crisper; this is living, Holbeh guessed. Also, the coffee was good, not as watery as the last time they had breakfasted at Lum's. Socket confirmed this observation: "Coffee's not bad today."

They both obtained free refills. Holbeh thought of all the detective novels in which coffee kept cropping up. In

Dashiell Hammett it was whiskey that cropped up all the time, but Holbeh seemed to remember hundreds of fictional private eyes who repeatedly "got coffee."

I phoned Bass and told him what Rupil had told me. Bass claimed he had never heard the rumor about Okov's first wife and the springer spaniels. "Keep in touch," I told him, "and drop by the Biltmore Friday at three." I hung up, shrugged, and nodded at Nadine. "Later," I said. She shrugged. I shrugged, and left, and got coffee at a deadly luncheonette. I had to think.

MARK HALLIDAY is a frequent contributor to the NAR.

"Mildew," said Holbeh, "did you ever know a gumshoe who didn't drink coffee?"

"A sleuth who spurned java? Not that I recall," said Socket, forking a yolk.

"That's what I figured," said Holbeh slowly.

"So?"

"So how come?"

"So guys in our line of work need to keep wide awake," Socket reasoned, "and they figure coffee—besides, practically everybody—"

"I know, I know. Everybody wants to keep awake," said Holbeh. For some reason he remembered one-on-one basketball games with Jeff Coutu and Bill Schiefflin when he was a boy; "Give Your All For Every Ball" was the motto he tried to obey in those contests, but he was frequently distracted . . . Holbeh studied his hashed browns. "But exactly why?" he asked Socket.

Socket opened his mouth to reply, but realized he was stumped. He filled his mouth with dripping toast, looking vaguely unsettled.

"It's a puzzler," Inspector Holbeh observed. He tapped his right knee with his spoon to remind himself of his vacation resolution: no probing of the Big One today. Today he was supposed to be off-duty.

"Anyway," Socket said after a minute—as usual, bringing everything back to the here and now—"it's good coffee, it tastes sort of rich."

The Case of the Violins

Later that same day Holbeh and Socket were at Socket's flat watching a rugby match on the telly. The phone rang. Socket answered it. A minute later he told Holbeh, "That was Nancy, next door. She thinks somebody stole her violin."

"Let's have a look-see," said Holbeh.

The two detectives crossed the snow-crueted driveway to the house next door which belonged to Nancy, an old friend of Socket's. Nancy was a short, healthy, freckled woman wearing shiny red ski pants because she had just been out skiing with her two daughters.

"I always keep it in this case," Nancy said, pointing to a handsome mahogany-trimmed glass case on the wall of the living room. Holbeh saw the vacant space in the case where the violin was meant to be displayed. It was clearly missing.

"Is the case locked?" Holbeh inquired.

"You got any coffee?" asked Socket.

"There's some in the pot, Mildew, but it tastes sort of bitter to me." Nancy smiled philosophically. "Try it."

Erica and Kirsten entered the living room and eyed the sleuths. Erica, seven years old, with cheeks like ripe mushrooms and beautiful credulous eyes, flopped down on her stomach on the fluffy rug before the fireplace. "Did you guys go skiing?" she asked Socket.

"There's so much snow," said Kirsten, who was twelve, "you can ski right down the street! It's so crazy."

"Do you keep the case locked?" Holbeh inquired, trying to catch Nancy's eye. He examined the case and saw that it had no lock. "Oh," he remarked. "Do the girls ever use the violin?"

"Kirsten has her own," said Nancy. "You'll find some brownies on the stove, Mildew," she called out to Socket who was disappearing into the kitchen.

"Erica, do you ever play violin?" Holbeh asked the flopped girl.

"Nope," she said loudly. She clapped her orange slippers together.

"That's what I figured," said Holbeh. He looked out the wide front window at the winter wonderland. That infinite whiteness was capable of making anything disappear.

"Maybe I'll have some cream on my brownie," Socket called from the kitchen. "That okay, Nance?"

"Cream? You mean ice cream?"

After a moment Socket appeared with his brownie in a bowl of white richness. "No, just cream. Dunked, that's how I like them best."

"It's a puzzler," said Inspector Holbeh, trying to concentrate. Concentration was always the key. He rubbed his eyelids gingerly. What matters? he wondered. He ignored Socket's brownie and tried to picture the absent violin. Does pleasure matter more than truth? After a moment Holbeh realized this question would get him nowhere.

"Now Kirsten'll probably lose *her* violin, too," Erica predicted cheerfully, "and then we'll have a great big gigantic mystery."

"Not me, I know exactly where mine is, it's leaning against the TV in the den," Kirsten affirmed with a toss of her flame-bright red hair, which contrasted strikingly with her pastel-blue ski pants.

"No it *isn't*," Erica proclaimed, "I put it on your bed so you wouldn't forget to put it back in its case."

"I'm afraid not, Erica," Kirsten parried, "I just saw it three seconds ago in the den."

"You *did*?" Erica's round eyes were suddenly magnified by a comprehension at once amused and guilty. "Then—then the one on your bed must be *Mom's*!" she shouted.

"Oh, how marvelous," Nancy said. "Sometimes the solution to a mystery is just a matter of remembering precisely what you've been doing."

"Erica, you're so dumb, you know Mom's is the one with the white frets," Kirsten said.

"I forgot," Erica giggled.

"Well," said Holbeh. He sighed a long sigh. "That's that." He wished all his inquests could bear such prompt fruit.

"Try a brownie, Hob," Nancy proposed.

"They're really something else!" Socket declared, beaming at his colleague in mid-chew.

The Case of the Echoes

A few days after the Case of the Violins was solved, Inspector Holbeh made the mistake of reading some detective stories. This was a mistake because he still meant to be on vacation from the Big One, and detective stories had a sneaky way of steering his thoughts toward the Big One no matter how hard he tried to limit himself to the

immediate pleasures of the specific situations described in specific stories.

He was visiting the library with Mildew Socket, who was searching for a book on model airplane construction. "I want to know how to do it *right*," said Socket. "My ambition is to be the best model airplane builder on the west side of my street between Euclid Avenue and Zeno Street."

"Such a modest ambition," Holbeh observed.

"Only kind that can let you be happy," declared Socket.

While Socket pored over How-To tomes, Holbeh permitted himself to drift toward the Mysteries shelf and his gaze fell, as if predetermined to do so, on a slender volume entitled *Mystères Sans Solutions*, edited by a French criminologist named Henri R. Sékwa. It was an anthology of unusual detective stories in which the detectives, despite much bilingual ingenuity from Paris to Chicago and from Mont St.-Michel to St. Louis, consistently failed to solve their mysteries. Surely not a lucrative premise for an anthology, Holbeh surmised; and yet he found himself unwilling to put the book down and move along to other shelves. He had never been one for skimming or speed reading or whirlwind raids on the library. Always his impulse was to dig in, and to stare.

He thought of his old friend Leland, a Marxist modern dancer in San Francisco. Leland had always urged him to look at broad sociological phenomena, trends, people shifting in masses. Leland tried not to linger too long with any one book; his mind always wanted to dance on toward the next book, the next package of data, the next list of answers. Holbeh could not live this way. For Holbeh life was a game of striving to catch the vastest truth shimmering in the tiniest pool.

So he gripped Sékwa's anthology firmly and stood there reading it though he sensed Leland's disapproving eyes watching from some high vantage point in Holbeh's head. The story Holbeh found himself reading was called "No Answers at the Jamboree." It had to do with a gathering of hundreds of detectives at a fancy hotel. Crimes were committed, of course, and all the sleuths competed to solve them. The detectives' efforts were mutually frustrating, of course, and the crimes grew more and more outrageous: the villain murdered three detectives in exact accordance with celebrated scenes in their own case-books.

Thus the weekend became a hell in which one's own ingenious rationalizations of reality became the weapons that threatened one's survival. What a way to go, mused Simon Frib, to be murdered by one's own echo.

Holbeh looked up from the page. He tried to focus on a fluorescent tube on the library ceiling while he took stock of his immediate experience—for he was experiencing something. A prickling of the scalp. A tidal flow of blood in his temples. Why? Because he had encountered this idea before, the idea of being killed by the echo, or the unforeseen replay, of one's own best achievement. The echo was fatal evidence that the achievement was not really special. Something like that . . .

Where?

"It's a puzzler," Holbeh murmured.

"My wingspan is six inches too short!" exclaimed Socket.

"Eh?"

"According to this manual."

"Socket, I've just bumped into a mystery."

Socket glanced at the book in Holbeh's hands. "Oh, Hob, don't read that. Sékwa. I've heard of the guy. His stories drive detectives stark raving bonkers. Drop it like a hot fritter."

Holbeh stubbornly held onto the little book. "Mildew, did you ever hear of a murder by echo?"

Socket was already re-engrossed in his model airplane manual. "What about murder by model?" he muttered. "Malevolent man makes monstrous Messerschmidt model that mows down masses in metropolitan Minneapolis."

"Minneapolis," Holbeh mused. It was a slim lead, but it was better than nothing. Because it did ring a bell: once in 1959 he had flown to Minneapolis to interrogate Jorge Segrob, a strange underworld figure whose supposed wisdom about boundless areas of human bafflement made him a key source in the Big One—the vast investigation upon which Inspector Holbeh had then just embarked. It had been a fruitless trip; Segrob had arranged a meeting in the Minneapolis Public Library, but at the rendezvous Holbeh had found nothing but silent tomes. Now Holbeh wondered, not without a shiver, whether Sékwa's *Mystères Sans Solutions* might have been on those Minneapolis shelves in 1959 . . .

It was a long shot, but it was better than nothing. Holbeh glanced once more at the book. "*On ne sait pas, dit Frib, 'mais on fait son possible quand même.'*"

"*Quand même*," Holbeh echoed. He replaced the book on the shelf and left the library. Instead of getting coffee in some luncheonette, he caught the afternoon flight to Minneapolis and looked up Segrob in the phone book there.

"Holbeh here," the Inspector said when Segrob answered.

"More or less," Segrob replied.

There was a nuance in Segrob's reply which Holbeh tried to seize. He realized, with a start, that he had stumbled backwards (as it were) into another crack at the Big One—for in the Big One, the world became a mass of nuances; indeed, the world started to seem like just one enormous nuance.

"*Quand même*," said Holbeh, "you have something to tell me." It was a low-odds chance, but it was better than nothing.

"You're just in time," said Segrob.

Holbeh waited but Segrob did not go on.

"I'm putting all my cards on the table," said Inspector Holbeh into the obscure mouthpiece of an obscure pay telephone in the Minneapolis Airport. "I'm on a case involving echoes."

"Natch," said Segrob.

"Tell me this, Jorge. How can one event ever be significant?" Holbeh scratched his shins intensively and

decided to go all the way. "By extension, how can one life be significant?"

"Just in time to play some basketball," said Segrob. "I've got a game all set for you, Inspector. Bill Schiefflin and Jeff Coutu are in town, and they're ready to play a two-on-one round-robin with you."

Segrob told him where the court was. Holbeh took a taxi and reached the court (on the playground of a junior high school) at dusk. Something about the topography was weirdly similar to that of the playground at Leroy Martin Junior High in Raleigh, North Carolina, where he had played ball with Schiefflin and Coutu nearly twenty years ago.

"Wait here," Holbeh told the cab-driver.

He began to walk across the mud-crusting playground toward the asphalt court. The Minneapolis moon was dimly discernible behind a shelf of burly clouds. Holbeh reached the court and stepped out on the asphalt under one of the baskets. No nets on the rims. Just like at Leroy Martin. Holbeh moved to the foul line, his black detective shoes crunching tiny bits of glass on the black surface. He raised his hands and released a phantom foul shot. Swish.

Then he saw two shapes moving across the playground in the dusk. One of them carried a round object. They were approaching the court but he could not yet make out their features.

Suddenly Inspector Holbeh's intuition registered danger—a trap! This *must* be a trap—how could Schiefflin and Coutu be here, ready to play ball, unless they were part of some insidious underworld plot to get him off the trail of the Big One?

Holbeh whirled and ran. He made it to the taxi and jumped in without looking back. "Airport," he gasped, "and step on it."

The Case of the Agitated Aunt

Inspector Holbeh entered the vestibule of his father's apartment building just as a sixtyish man opened the inner door on his way out to the street. Rather than buzz up and disturb his aunt (who was supposed to be cooking the roast pork in his father's apartment), Holbeh elected to slip through the inner door before it closed behind the older man.

As they passed each other, the older man seemed to give Holbeh a suspicion of a nod, and perhaps the shadow of a smile. (Later Holbeh would attempt to reconstruct the smile and judge whether it might be termed furtive.) The gentleman appeared well-dressed, well-nourished and rather dignified, Holbeh noted; trim, carrying himself as if he believed that the contents of his substantive brown briefcase made him worthy of respect. When one is a detective one can't help registering such perceptions in spite of oneself.

Holbeh climbed two flights to his father's apartment and his aunt let him in and engulfed him in an embrace. As they disengaged, she tottered slightly—gracefully, despite her big-boned stature—and said: "Oh, Hob, I'm so happy you're here, the pork is in the oven, actually it's two

roasts not one, because your dad said it might be *nine* people for dinner, so I went out and bought a little one just to be on the safe side, and I had to borrow a second meat thermometer because they're cooking at different rates, aren't they? Wouldn't you think they'd be ready at different times, you're good at math and things like that."

"Lois," Holbeh protested, "you've done an awful lot more cooking than I have."

"But it's the math. Oh, anyway, I just hope it's all done by the time your dad and everybody get here, I got started a little late, did you see anybody on the way in?" Aunt Lois leaned close to her nephew and read him intently with her oceanic blue eyes.

"As I came into the building?"

"Yes, I thought you might have, oh, Hob, I've had quite an afternoon, I wish you'd gotten here a little earlier, you could have met Rod."

"Rod?"

"There, you see, you're right on top of me, aren't you. But then it's your profession, you *have* to be that way, it's your job to *find things out*, isn't it?"

"Some things," said Inspector Holbeh, feeling sudden itches in three spots on his face, "but not *everything*, Lois, thank God."

"Oh," said Lois, with an air of trying to catch his concealed meaning, "well, of course you don't have to know anything you don't want to know about this. There must be so much on your mind . . . What are you working on these days, anyway, your father never tells me."

"Well, I'm back on the case I was working on last Christmas—the Big One."

"Is it a big case, I'll bet it is."

"It's a collection of cases, actually . . . Or a series . . ."

"Oh," said Lois, bending to peer frankly at the pork in the oven. "Well, it's all very mysterious to me, you know, Hob, your work gets so abstract nowadays, I really don't know what it's all about."

Inspector Holbeh smiled. "Actually, that's exactly what—"

"I have enough trouble just understanding my own life," Lois said. She smiled suggestively. A familiar sense of infinite innuendo awoke an itch on Holbeh's left shin, and he said:

"Who is Rod?"

"Oh, you're a mind-reader! Rod is a dear dear man who dated me when I was in college, that's almost fifty years ago, forty-eight years ago, Hob, just think of it! And would you believe he was here all day long? He couldn't leave! I told him I had to cook this whole dinner for your dad and everybody, but Rod just stayed and stayed and we drank this whole bottle of Manhattans!" Lois held up a brown bottle that was nearly empty. "Well, what do you think of your old aunt, Hob?"

"It sounds like you had fun."

"Hob—he's a married man."

"Oh. Well . . ."

"I didn't know what to do!" Lois exclaimed. "He just wouldn't leave!" She chuckled heartily, remembering some image whose radiance flashed across her face. "He's a judge, would you believe it?" Lois told her nephew.

"Gosh, if some of his defendants could have seen him today! Not to mention his wife!"

"Well," said Holbeh, reaching with alacrity for a can of Spanish peanuts and wondering what else they could talk about, "it sounds fairly harmless."

"But I haven't told you everything," said Lois.

"Oh," said Holbeh. He carefully looked away from his aunt and feigned a mild interest in the Kandinsky print on his father's wall calendar. Do we ever learn? he thought. Is there to be no end to our feverish fumbling? Must this impassioned clay persist in its secular hurrying through space (Lord Russell's phrase) with no comfort of eventual wisdom? Will we pursue each other all the way to senility and beyond?

"Should I cook the peas now, or wait?" Lois asked.

"You're the boss," said Holbeh. "I'd say we could hold off on the peas till the other—"

"I told him you'd be here any minute and that finally got him going. He thought you might be a little alarmed to find your old aunt with this strange man—oh, it's not what you're thinking, but still—just think, after forty-eight years! Isn't it strange? Oh, Hob, what's it all about?"

Inspector Holbeh sighed between peanut swallows. "I don't know, Lois. If I did, it would mean I had finally solved—"

The door of the apartment opened noisily and admitted his father and brother and a convivial platoon of dinner guests. Everyone said hello hello and beamed amid the aroma of the roast pork.

The Case of the Bright-Eyed Walker

"Define it again," requested Mildew Socket.

The two detectives had accompanied Socket's neighbors (Nancy and her daughters Kirsten and Erica) to the large shopping mall near Socket's flat. The mall was an indoor park, a carpeted glen lined with shops blooming with alleged bargains. There was a splendid leisure in their stroll along the well-lit walkways; they were not shopping for anything in particular, it was a pastime merely to walk through it all. Inspector Holbeh was not insensible of the easefulness, yet experience had taught him that clues about the Big One were often most tantalizingly near at precisely such comfortable moments. He had said as much to Socket moments ago.

"Mildew, we've been through it a thousand times."

"Yes," said Socket, "but somehow I keep losing the handle. It's—it's all about—"

"What is it all about?"

"That's what I'm asking."

"That's what *I'm* asking," said Holbeh.

"Bloody loose definition of a mystery," Socket grumbled.

"Can we get some ice cream?" Erica asked.

"Absolutely," said Nancy.

The five wanderers betook themselves to the Baskin-Robbins store at mid-mall, pausing en route to let Socket buy a tube of model airplane glue in the Crafts Shop. "Stuff has to be strong to hold those big wings on the fuselage," Socket noted.

Adhesion, Holbeh said to himself; but the concept seemed a dead end.

They all bought sundaes and sat on the benches by the colored fountain and ate their ice cream with various degrees and styles of pleasure. Erica finished first.

"Could Coutu and Schiefflin really have been there in Minneapolis?" Holbeh asked Socket rhetorically.

"Possible," Socket shrugged.

"But highly improbable. Why should they be mixed up with Segrob's bizarre maneuvers? And for that matter, what's in it for Segrob? Why should he want to make me believe that life is a great Ferris wheel?"

"Ferris wheel?" echoed Erica eagerly. "Where's a Ferris wheel?"

"Just a figure of speech, Erica," said Inspector Holbeh. He looked at Erica and noticed the marvelous capacity for wonder in her wide blue eyes. She was gazing at the rainbow-lighted fountain as she licked chocolate from her lips. She had been here before, and would return many times, but this repetition did not seem to alarm her.

"If you go by Faulkner," mused Mildew Socket, "the past is not dead; it is not even past."

"Mmm," said Holbeh. "Life can be awfully Faulknerian even in the north . . . if that Sékwa story is on the mark, Mildew, maybe we're fated to *live* insights which we first enunciated long ago . . ."

"I'm tired of sitting," Erica announced. "Can we get moving?"

"Oh, Erica," said Kirsten in an elder-sibling voice, "you're never satisfied."

"Yes I am too," Erica said, but she sounded as if she hadn't bothered to think it over.

They all rose from the bench and began to move away from the fountain. Erica led the way, followed by Kirsten who studied shoes and purses in display windows, followed by the three adults who carried their unfinished sundaes.

"Well, Hob, your vacation's about over," said Socket, "and if you ask me it's a good thing. You need to get back to regular cases, man. I mean the type where the mystery is specific, for God's sake, like who killed so-and-so. If you stay on these metaphysical cases you'll be lost. No kidding. You'll disappear in a cloud of questions."

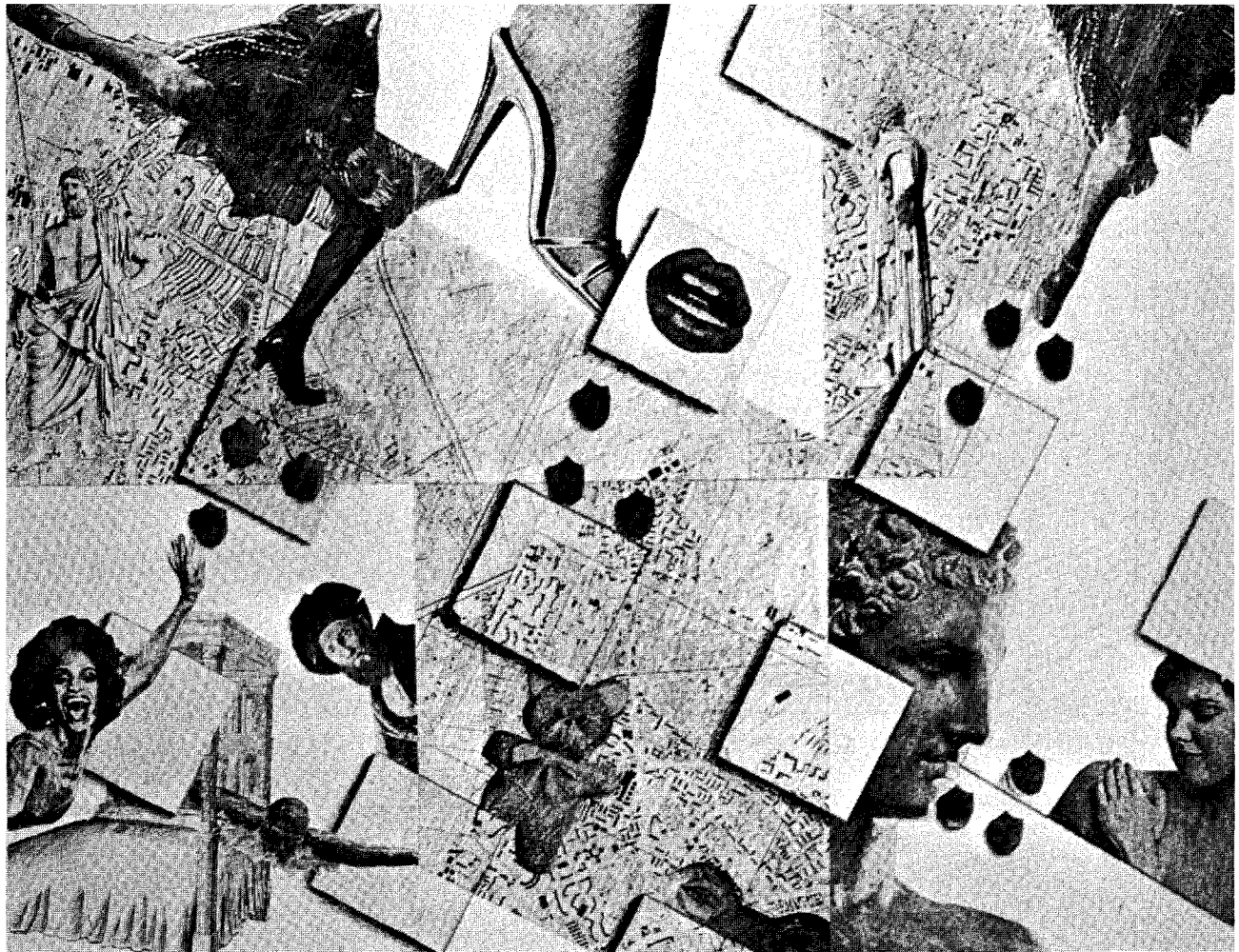
Holbeh nodded pensively and poked at his melting Jamocha almond fudge with his tiny pink spoon. He and Socket turned the corner to walk up the east wing of the mall, following Nancy and Kirsten, who were laughing now about their difficulties with their violins.

Suddenly Holbeh realized that Erica had disappeared. "Oh God, not another mystery," he groaned. He and Socket turned and ran back to the intersection of the indoor avenues.

"There!" Socket pointed.

Holbeh looked and saw the little girl's blond head moving serenely away along the north wing. The clusters of shoppers going the other way seemed to part for her like the Red Sea. She had not yet realized she was alone. Before calling her name, Inspector Holbeh took a moment to savor his perception of the beautiful steady confidence with which Erica proceeded among the mall's many amusements. □

Shelley Costa
A WOMAN OF QUALITY



She wears straw hats as soon as the weather turns nice, and white kid gloves with little pearl buttons. Those gloves are her single exception. Never, never will she visibly wear white before Memorial Day. She buys nothing but stockings with seams. Like a fashion accessory, even. I say nothing. Panty hose, she tells me, are an abomination, a vicious device that leads to nothing but mysterious infections. I wouldn't know.

Her shoes she calls pumps, every hat other than her straws she calls a cloche, and from what I have seen the word "dress" is simply a verb. "That's a nice shift, Merit," she'll say. "When did it come in the mail?" Or, "This old shirtwaist is worn beyond repair. Perhaps I'll

put it out for the ragman—unless you want it, dear? It's cotton." There is no ragman. That much I know. Twice a week I look through the curtains and see the grey Department of Sanitation truck, workers with thick protective gloves and no expression. She passes out of the house, gives them a single, respectful nod on her way to work, and still believes in a ragman.

Believes, too, in a place to work. Even though Finch College, where she taught typing and shorthand to Manhattan debutantes for thirty-five years, has closed. She

SHELLEY COSTA has published earlier fiction in Cleveland magazine. She is in the Ph.D. program at Case Western Reserve.

and the institution, apparently, both reached retirement age the same year. Still, every weekday morning she adjusts her straw (in nice weather), her kids, her seams, and her dirndl, and sets off toward the Grand Army Plaza "el" (which, of course, isn't) and a job that no longer exists.

Make no mistake. She intends no deception. Neither of us, after all, is deceived. She is my mother—and, for that matter, a considerable improvement over my father and brother, wherever they may be. Unlike them, she has a great, superficial mind. She believes in routine and, as far as I can tell, buildings. I thought for the longest time that she believed in God, or merely religion. Churches, synagogues, mosques, chapels of all manner and kind figure so prominently in her conversation. But she has never mentioned God to me, and touches on religion only in its capacity to make something of steel and mortar, and not men's souls. "I see here in the paper that St. Saviour's is planning to put up a school." So I concluded that it was buildings themselves she reveres, and not the institutions they house. In point of fact, in all her years at Finch, she missed work only once. When they tore down the Met, she stayed in bed, stricken, for two days. And on the third morning, as she left the house, I noticed that her seams were crooked. Buildings are the concrete and steel girders of her remarkable psychic landscape. As sound and beautiful to her as her daily routine.

I am her daughter. Forty-two years old. I believe in cotton. History. Birds in winter. And nothing else. I read, although I wouldn't say I believe in it. Not in literature, certainly. Not any longer. Not since Father and Perry left. I read instructions when I need to—how to make a dress, a quilt, a coddled egg—and the first two pages of the *New York Times*. I continue to read as long as I can, although I'm becoming increasingly allergic to newsprint and already use cotton gloves to turn the pages. I read at all because I've not left the house for the past eighteen years. I read because I have a certain amount of time on my hands.

One day when I was seven, Father left.

One day when I was thirty-seven, I saw him standing across the street, near the entrance to Prospect Park. Both times he was wearing a wool overcoat and tan fedora. He always looked fine in hats. I pulled back the curtain. We watched each other silently. For a while he sat on the bench, his hands clasped between his knees. As the day darkened, our neighbor's carriage lamp went on. Father waited. Our own lamp remained dark. I shook my head at him. He looked puzzled. The light had broken a week ago. "I suppose I'll have to call in one of those people," she had said. Mother has great disdain for professional repairmen. "Hawks," she says. "Vultures. Pilot fish."

I took a blank card out of her recipe card file. "Dear Father," I wrote. "The trouble may be in the socket." I signed my name and taped the card to the inside of the window. As he started to cross the street, I went upstairs to my room. In a few minutes, he stepped back and saw me at my window. Touching the brim of his hat, he nodded at me and hurried back across Ninth Avenue and into the park.

"Merit, the carriage lamp is working," Mother announced two days later. "Did you call one of those people?"

"No."

"Then who?"

"It was—an older man," I hesitated. "He was in the neighborhood the other day."

"An oddjob man!" She was delighted. "Do you think he sharpens scissors? Did he have a grinder?"

"Not that I saw," I said. "I think he only works outdoors."

"Is he Italian? Does he have a mustache?"

"He has a mustache, yes." Remarkable as ever. And the same visionary blue eyes he always pointed to among his evidence. "You see these, little girl?" I remember. He opened his copy of *Mosses from an Old Manse* to the frontispiece. "Same eyes. Same vision," he'd say darkly, and talk cryptically about the author's mother. Betsey Clarke Manning. Her younger brother, Richard, Jr. He's the one. He's the branch you're attached to, little twig. Whole damn lot of Salem Mannings. Brooklyn Mannings, now! he'd say, closing the volume.

He tried planting a garden once, a tiny green oasis in the cement yard behind the house. During this period he called me Beatrice. He planted nightshade, dogbane, figwort, and three different kinds of orchids. Here and there he set out pots of Venus flytraps. He sprayed. He weeded. He watered. He sweated. He prayed. The garden did not flourish. He was encouraged once when a mosquito fell dead at my feet. Still, the plants failed. "Ah, Beatrice," he cried. Nothing wild, deep and sensual overreached the wire fence to grow down around his feet. Nothing lovely and mysterious climbed up overhead. Only a candid sunflower thrived. He gave up the garden.

Soon afterwards, Mother developed warts on the palm of her hand. Father revived. He studied her hand, spent hours in the cellar staring into the furnace, studied her hand once more, and went about setting up a lab. A long, heavy, used lab table was installed. Beakers, test tubes, petri dishes, bunsen burners arrived daily. He feverishly set up his equipment and sent my brother Perry out with a shopping list. "Ah, clod! ah, earthly mass!" he cried when Perry returned with his loaded wagon, a copy of *Lord Jim* in his hands. Wax, ammonia, canned milk, nail polish remover, chicken livers, sand, and table salt. These were the ingredients I recognized. Others were kept carefully hidden. He treated Mother's hand with a sun lamp, ice packs, and long hours immersed in boric acid. In the meantime he worked in the cellar, mixing, heating and cooling his solution. Finally, it was ready: a gritty, smelly paste he spread over Mother's palm, and bandaged. Over the next couple of days, she complained of terrible itching. His eyes gleamed. When he unwrapped her hand and scraped away the cure, we gasped. Her palm was covered with hives. We could hardly see the warts.

It was unsurprising that he retired *Mosses* to a bookshelf and rediscovered *Twice-Told Tales*. "Allegory, for the most part," he assured my mother. "And simple little histories of our Puritan ancestors." "Just as long as you don't put up a maypole in the middle of the parlor," she

said. "I don't want Perry to get any ideas. He's turning more and more like you." He was hurt, I could tell. All those failures. He believed, for a while, I think, that the failures were somehow worth the efforts—how can a failure be anything but noble, after all, when it comes of a noble attempt? But, success. He needed to succeed. Some simple, mundane, unremarkable success—he no longer cared how high, how deep—was what he wanted. He could have managed a maypole. Out back, next to the sunflower. He felt thwarted.

When he left the house as usual that last morning, he was carrying a briefcase I had never seen and an umbrella. "I may be late," he said. "Wait. Your book." "No, no," he waved. "I won't be needing it." He never came home. She found a bookmark in the rejected tales, read quietly, and never mentioned Father again. Later, after she had gone to bed, I opened the book. "Wakefield," it read. And it was infallible. Father didn't need a robust garden or mysterious cure. No planting and tending this time. No measuring and stirring. This time all he had to do to succeed was simply to walk out of the house once and for all.

Father, I was sure, had found a place somewhere in the neighborhood.

Mother went to work.

Years later, Perry left N.Y.U. and joined the Merchant Marine. We received a colorful picture postcard from him: stern-looking Africans stood in front of low foliage and a phlegmatic elephant. "Greetings from the Belgian Congo," it read. On the back was my brother's small, neat script. "The horror! The horror!" was the message. She tacked the postcard to the cork board in the kitchen. Next to the newspaper recipe for salmon casserole and an article on keeping crinolines white and starched even after repeated washings.

A letter from Vera, with a newspaper clipping: Annie, she reminds me, is at Barnard now—can still hardly believe it, can you?—struggling, poor dear, through a political science course. She has an idea for a term paper, but she needs your help.

"What does she have to say?"

"Her girl Annie's at Barnard."

"Did you forget?"

"No," I say. "That's just Vera's way. She talks to me like I've been unconscious for ages and she's the first person I see. You remember me, dontcha, your old pal Hunk?" Annie, you remember, is an English major at Barnard. Sam—you remember Sam, my husband?—is an obstetrician, you remember, at St. Barnabas in Livingston, New Jersey, and doesn't play golf on Wednesday or any other day. You remember New Jersey, don't you? And golf? And you couldn't forget Wednesday, now could you?

"She's just being nice. She hasn't seen you now for years."

"Fifteen," I say. "You remember. Annie was small."

"Vera looked grand. Such a smart tweed she was wearing."

"I don't remember."

Instead I see her riding beside me on the chartered bus to Washington. She played nervously with the locket she was wearing. We were sixteen. "Do you want a Free Ethel and Julius Rosenberg sign? Or one that says, Stop Creeping McCarthyism Now?"

"Do I have to carry a sign?"

"Yes."

Her smile was brave. "Then either one is fine. Whichever one you don't want."

"They're both good."

"Will we get into trouble?"

There were two dozen of us, including two teachers from our high school—one with a beard, one with a beret. They were lovers, we were sure, and radicals. I yearned and moaned to be like them. The demonstration—the rest of the morning at the White House, from there we go to Capitol Hill in time for the afternoon session, where, depending on the press coverage, we either march or sit and sit until they come with the wagon to take us brutally and so forth—was their idea. The planning was mine. I handed out flyers in the classrooms at Fieldston and in the community, smiled at the spit and the fists, arranged for the bus, painted and hammered the placards.

"It's possible," I told Vera.

"I don't understand causes," she said.

"What don't you understand about them?"

"The people. There's no—moderation."

"We're too passionate?"

"Something like that."

"You sound like my mother." A woman of quality, she tells me, does everything in proportion. Balance, she says. Balance is all. A woman of quality does not wear trousers and display her private thoughts and feelings on signs for all manner of people to see.

There was no coverage at all and only a few spectators. We marched and chanted, scowled and pumped our signs. My feet hurt so much I finally took off my tennis shoes. I learned that I sweat at the waist—it trickled down my thighs in the Washington heat—and that I was allergic to engine exhaust and cherry blossoms. My eyes were so swollen I could hardly see the junior senator from Wisconsin as he stalked up the steps to the Capitol. "Red devils," he called us. I cried.

On the way home in the bus, I fell asleep on Vera's shoulder. I had forgotten my shoes. My sign lay broken on the seat in front of us. "It was a good march," she consoled me and sang "A Hundred Bottles of Beer on the Wall" along with the others.

P.S., Vera writes, thought you might like to see this. I pick up the newspaper clipping. ANDERSON TO SPEAK AT BROOKLYN COLLEGE. Wynn Anderson, former Vista volunteer and regional spokesman for the Liberal Party, will speak at the Brooklyn College School of Law on Joralemon St., May 29 at 4 P.M. A member of Vista since its inception, Anderson will discuss the liberal ideals underlying the agency, his experiences as a volunteer and administrator, and Vista's uncertain future. The public is invited to attend.

"What did she send you?"

I crumple the paper. "Nothing important," I say, and turn away.

I write to Vera.

I'm sorry Annie is having a bad term at college. I don't know why she thinks I could help her. If she's doing a paper on the history of the Liberal Party in this country, tell her to go to the library. Besides, I don't understand her interest in me. I do nothing. I never did. Let her wear plain cotton dresses, donate her books to Goodwill, and get out of the city. That's all the help I can give her. If she gets involved with men, she's gone to the world. If she gets involved with art, she's gone to the world. If she gets involved with ideas, she's gone to herself and you'll never get her back.

We pushed to the front of the crowd at the civil rights rally in the Columbia gym. Vera unbuttoned her raincoat. "This next one's pretty good," she nodded at the platform. "Anderson. He's a graduate student in economics. He came into our class last week and talked about the myth of the affluent society."

His face was candid and intelligent. He put aside the microphone.

Is there anybody here who disagrees that quality education is a fundamental right of free men and women? he said.

We looked around. No answer.

Of course not. We're university students. We come from Columbia, Fordham, N.Y.U., Queens, Brooklyn—Seton Hall! someone yelled.

Rutgers!

Wynn Anderson smiled. I'm glad to see it, he said. We come from all over because we care about what's happening down in Little Rock. You believe in people's capitalism, maybe. That's what they call it. It gives you new cars, new clothes, new credit, new debts. But they're yours. It gives you waste, blighted highways, crowded schools and hospitals. But they're yours. Things like poverty, unemployment, inequality. They're not yours. But they're someone else's. And if they're someone else's—then they're the same as yours!

He paused. I felt unsteady in the crowd. Vera handed me a handkerchief.

One week ago, he said, Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus closed the Little Rock schools. They were about to integrate. Since then, there have been riots. Black students have been bullied, threatened, and humiliated. Has anyone here ever been locked out of a school?

No answer.

Has anyone here ever been cursed, pushed, or taunted on the way to school?

No answer.

I want you to write to the White House. Ask for federal troops to be sent immediately to Little Rock, Arkansas, to insure the peaceful integration of the public schools. Will you do that?

Yes!

Yes!

"Merit? Merit, what is it?" Vera grabbed my arm. I was wheezing.

"The crowd," I said. "Cigarette smoke. Smells. All kinds of smells."

"Come on. Let's get out of here."

Over the next two weeks, I worked with Anderson on the follow-up to the rally. Together we made banners, posters, flyers, and petitions. Along with about a dozen others, we became the University Civil Rights Task Force. On the night before we left to drive to Little Rock to see the situation for ourselves, we sat alone in his small apartment on Mulberry Street. He made spaghetti on a hot plate and talked about the impoverishment of the public sector. I poured the wine again and again. Later, we listened to Mahler's first. I began to like his straight, light hair and crooked smile. He washed dishes in the bathroom sink, splattering suds on his sweater. I felt love, then, like cramps, sitting on the edge of the tub with a copy of *American Capitalism* in my hands. Finally, I stood up. One hand touched his sleeve, the other a wet, chipped plate. I kissed him. We listened for a while to Mahler's ninth, and then went to bed. It felt deep and political, like a revolution.

We were lovers. And radicals, I thought. Although I was becoming less and less sure of my terms.

Mother is uptown when I hear the doorbell. Carefully, I pull back the curtain and squint into the sunlight. I see a girl, thin, in patched jeans and a blue blazer. She has red hair, clamped partly to her shoulder by a large canvas sack. "Junque," it reads. She bites her lip and rings again. Then she sees me. Her hand comes up to wave as I let the curtain fall.

"Merit? Is that you?" I hear her. "It's Annie Hewitt, Vera's daughter. Do you remember me?"

"Yes." I feel angry. "What are you doing here?"

"I need to talk to you. Can I come in?"

"I told your mother I couldn't see you. I don't see anybody."

"I'm doing a paper for a political science course that's been giving me a lot of trouble."

"The history of the Liberal Party."

"That's right." She pushes past the evergreens to the window. "Mom told you."

I can see only her cheek through the narrow opening in the curtain. "Go to the library, where you belong."

"I don't want to. I don't like libraries. My idea is to interview different liberals who could give me a firsthand account of the party's development."

"I can't help you."

"I don't believe you."

"Go see Wynn Anderson later this month. Your mother will tell you about it. He may help you."

"But I don't know him."

I finger the doily on the back of the sofa. "You don't know me, either. That doesn't seem to stop you."

"It's not true," she says. "I know a lot about you." She taps on the windowpane. "Please let me see you. Mom says you look like Geraldine Fitzgerald."

"Your mother is wrong," I say dully. "Now go away."

She taps again. "Merit? We don't have to talk about the party or the paper or any of that. Not if you don't want to. Really. It's a stupid idea, anyway. Can't I just come in for a while?"

"No."

Her voice is soft. "I need to talk to somebody. To you."

"No." I stand up. "I'm sorry. No."

I hear her sigh. "I'll come back tomorrow."

"Talk to Wynn Anderson," I say, shaking. "He was always helpful. Talk to him. I won't see you."

"When will I see you again?" I remember Mother was sobbing. I was about to tell her, when she said, "Oh, never. Even if you come back, you'll be different. Never again the same. If you go with that man to Spain—live with that awful man—you'll lose yourself for good. I can promise you that." Again, Mother's theory of woman as a well men drink from and drink from until there's nothing left and the bucket hits bottom.

We lived in Madrid for a year on Wynn's Fulbright. He taught American Economic Theory at the university and prepared his dissertation on the economic basis of the Spanish Civil War. I picked up photography, spent warm days in the Prado and cool ones taking day tours to the nearby monastery, el Escorial, or Toledo. Once I sat at the roadside for so long, overlooking the town just as El Greco had, that I nearly missed the bus. On weekends we boated in the park, munching sandwiches on the great stone lions. I photographed the flea market with its donkeys and bright umbrellas. Or we loitered about the Plaza. The only pictures Wynn ever took were of me—me, happy and windblown on the deserted bandstand. Me, my arms around my knees, alone in the park. Me, sleeping late on Sunday mornings.

Holidays we spent in the south. At a clean, small hotel in Malaga, run by a hardy middle-aged woman named Maruja. She liked her guests and was glad there were few. Her linen was spotless, bed and table, and soup was plentiful. We were always too full for anything else. Still, she served little shellfish empanadas, and fresh fish. We laughed and wrapped in napkins what we couldn't even touch, dropping them furtively into our pockets. The beach was rocky and crowded. I learned I was allergic to salt water and, I suspected, sand. Rashes and wheezing kept me away, finally. Wynn didn't mind. The vegetation was tropical and abundant, not at all like Madrid. Palms drooped from overhead or shot outward like blades from the warm ground. We came daily to an outdoor café near the ocean. There we sipped *jerez* and talked.

Over the year I watched my hips grow bigger and Wynn grow restless. The dissertation was done, the teaching nearly so. Then the news came, from a friend back home in the State Department. A Peace Corps, Kennedy was thinking. And a domestic agency—Volunteers in Service to America. Vista. Vision. Plans. Kennedy had plans. Come help.

"Merit, this is it," he said. "A chance for us to do some real work. No more classrooms or libraries. We can get married and go together wherever they send us. The Southwest. Maybe Appalachia. There are so many possibilities. Do you realize what this means?"

No more melons or fresh shrimp as long as my hand.

No more parrots or cool Spanish tiles or love on a small, soft mattress with Wynn.

"You knew it was only for a year," he said.

"I know."

"Then I don't understand."

Digging toilets, hauling manure, slopping pigs, birthing children, tearing down shanties and putting up shacks. What don't you understand? Bending closer and closer to the earth like a rain heavy limb? Spitting up dust? Skills. You want to teach them skills, you say. Don't bother with pollution control or waste water management or English grammar or electrical engineering. Teach them not to lay their sisters and daughters under the porch, or anywhere at all, for that matter. Teach them not to get drunk, run down, and run over. Teach them those things, if you like, damn it. And then talk to me about humanity.

What he understood finally was that it wasn't Spain. It wasn't Vista. It was him. I didn't love him. Couldn't marry him. I let him think it. He sat, hurt and amazed, on the bed while I packed. I had to leave. Had to be out of there before he really had time to see. All my fine indignation of the past few years had left me. Simply left me. Like pain. I couldn't let him see my relief. Or the monster of self-interest I really was. It was so much less terrible for him to think I didn't love him. And the amazement would pass, like a cyclone, and leave him intact in the storm cellar of his fierce social consciousness. He would go on with his work.

I returned home—Mother was right—different. The bucket had hit bottom. And not, as she cared to think, from overdrinking. But from evaporation. The well, it seems, had only a thin layer of water from the start.

I never left the house again.

"Mother?" I open her door the morning after Annie's visit. "You've overslept. You'll be late." She lies straight on her back, her grey hair neat on the pillow. I look at her for a moment and then touch her. She's cold. Dead, even. Deader than Father. Deader than me. Deader even than Perry, probably. She skipped sickness like a grade in school. Her mouth is open. I step away from the bed. She seems surprised. We are both surprised.

I am a space walker with a broken line. Slow cartwheels in the darkness as my air gives out. Air and time. Was all I ever wanted. My tears stagnate.

Arrangements.

Tranquilizers. Allergic. Flowers. Allergic. Crowds. Allergic. Allergic. Tumbling unnoticed into the open grave. Let me go. Metal. Allergic. Cool earth. Allergic. No matter.

Bills. Make no mistake. Lawyers. Bank statements. Stock reports. Do I need reading glasses? An accountant? Do I sell the house? Do I hire someone to come in three times a week? Where is the grocery store? The mailbox? The Red Cross? Greatest natural disaster in the history of Brooklyn.

Father sits on the bench across the street. The door latch is metal. No time for gloves. He sees me and stands. I can only push my arm upward a few times and shake my head. "It's Mother," I call out. "Mother. She's dead." He

tucks a newspaper under his arm and backs away. "No! Please!" I'm outside. The air surrounds me, heavy like water for missiles. "Please help me." Still he shakes his head and backs away into the park. I can only watch. "All right!" I scream. "All right! You can go to hell, you crazy, selfish old man."

I slam the door.

Can I leave Mother there? Just leave her? Close up the house for good and move away? Maybe just the upstairs. Close off the upstairs and live down here. Almost the same as before.

No. It's obscene. A woman of quality takes care of things. She doesn't leave her mother upstairs. Not that way. Not so sad and quiet in her nightgown. Her mouth slightly open. For no good reason.

I feel a knock at my back. "Who is it?"

"Merit? Are you right inside the door? It's me, Annie."

"Not now. Go away."

"Is something wrong?"

She waits.

"My mother," I say. "She's dead."

"Oh, God. Let me in." She pounds. "Merit, let me in. I can help you."

I feel tired. Infected. She slips in like a draft. We stand in the dark hall, looking at each other. "I'm sorry," she says.

Annie follows me upstairs. I wait outside while she looks at Mother. "I don't remember her at all," she says to me on the stairs. I wonder when it happens. When I have to stop and think about her tastes and habits. Did she like blue? What was her favorite card game? How did she vote in '56? I don't remember. I stand in the kitchen while Annie uses the phone.

Soon they come, a doctor, I think, and an ambulance. Annie finds some sherry and pours me a glass. She doesn't know I can't drink. Or maybe she does. Still, I drink. Away from the nods and whispers. Overhead the ceiling creaks. In a while they come down slowly. "Watch the corner," I hear. "Careful. Don't bang the edge." Mother is going. Moved like a fine piece of furniture. I put my head down and cry.

"We'll let you know," Annie says to them. "But later today. It's still too soon. Goodbye. We'll call you this afternoon."

She comes in.

"Thank you, Annie."

She nods. "You know, I've never had to do that before."

"I still haven't."

"It isn't over yet," she says. I know. "How about breakfast?" She cooks. I'm grateful for normal morning sounds. Eggs breaking, coffee perking. Knives and forks. She talks about Barnard, how hard the first year has been. Too many students smarter, surer, than she is. They study well, answer perfectly, test higher, start papers as soon as they're assigned. And they're in bed by eleven—twelve if they party. "Me," Annie says, "I lost my confidence last June when I graduated from high school. They handed me my diploma. I handed them my confidence."

"Maybe it was an even trade. For a while."

She shakes her head. "I'm left with not so very much. Just a lot of fears."

"Like what?"

"Well, I'm afraid of falling. Not from any heights. Just walking along and falling. And I'm afraid of failing. That's a natural one, I guess, considering. I'm afraid of elevators. Baseballs. Libraries. I'm afraid of snow, getting lost in the snow. I'm afraid of loud noises. I'm afraid of suffocating. I'm afraid of men. And mosquitoes brushing my cheeks." She puts down her glass. "Mostly," she says, "I'm afraid of becoming like you."

I can't look at her, at those earnest eyes people have when they have to hurt you. Afraid of becoming like me. "I wish I had been," I say. "I wish I had been afraid of becoming like me."

We come to hear him. His face is leaner, I think. I feel in my pocket for the respirator the doctor has taught me to use. There are a lot of people. I'm still afraid. "You won't need it," Annie whispers. His hair is shorter. Paler, but it might be the light. During the talk, Annie concentrates, busy with a notebook. I cover my eyes like Moses. Penetrated.

He had dug toilets.

He had dug ditches.

And graves.

If he feels it, no one can tell. For Wynn, it was an ordinary life. He is out there rolling up his sleeves, pitching in, sharing the load. Just like all the rest of us. After all these years no one has the heart to tell him about the bored, the idle, the disappointed and uninspired. But they need volunteers, too. Someone to dig and chop and plant and build for them. Their land is the poorest of all.

I know.

I have done nothing for eighteen years now. But never once has it felt ordinary. For days at a time I dug my fingernails into my skin. A table. Skin again. A chair. Splinters, occasionally, and blood. As sharp as faith. Still, I stayed in. I built reasons like pyramids, a blessed, back-breaking stone at a time. I had worked as hard as Wynn.

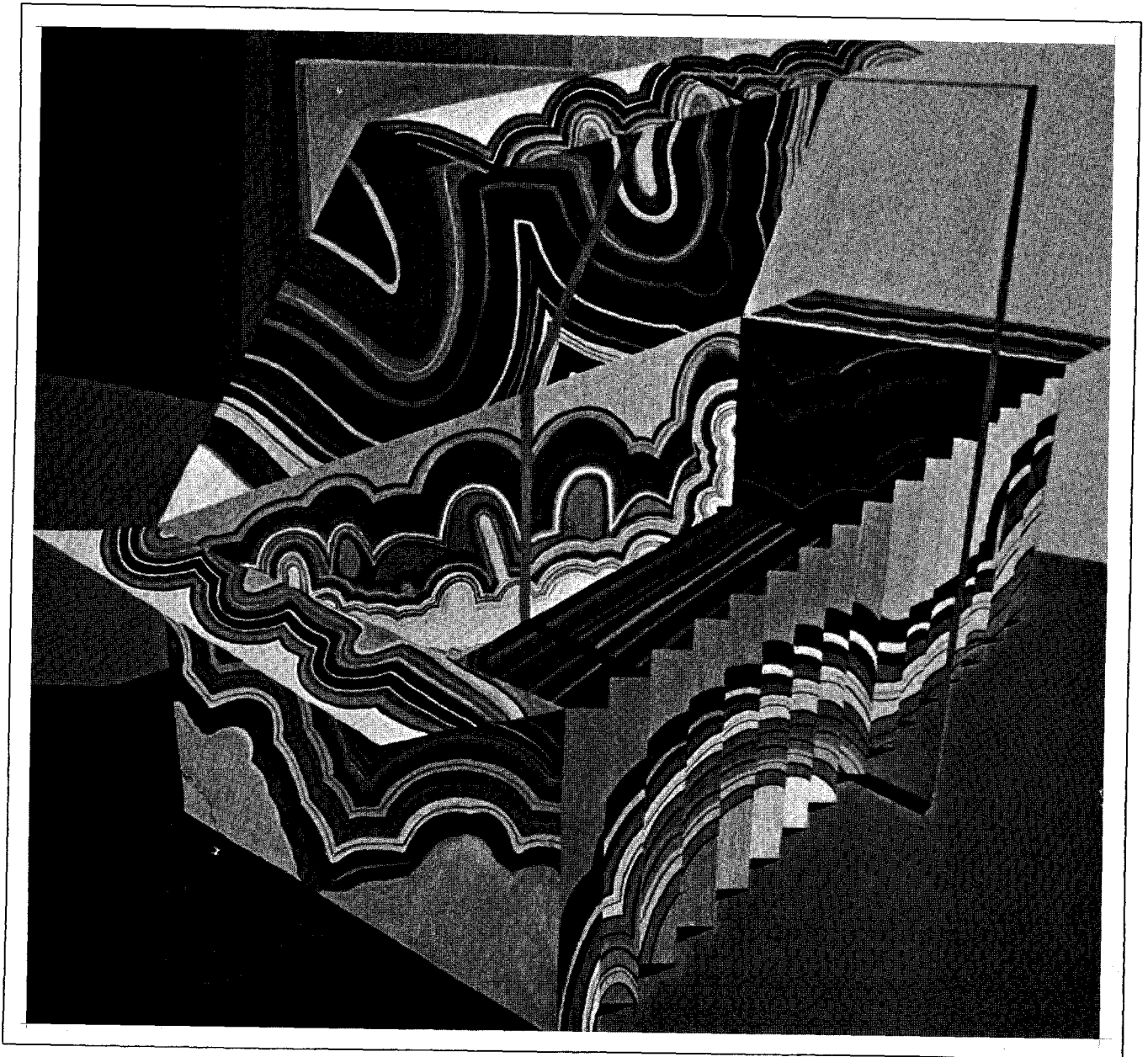
No. Harder.

I leave with the others, waiting behind the auditorium door long enough to be sure Annie is talking with him. Suddenly she turns in my direction and points. He looks surprised. I wonder whether he'll come out to see me. It's not something I want. Not the plainness, our eyes shut down like abandoned mines. Some talk of how nice, how long, not much and you, a lovely wife Jean and three kids. It's not something I want. Not like that. And if it's better, if I think for a second it might be better, then I might as well start reading books again.

Annie is coming to live with me for a while. She talks about concerts in the park and trips to Jones Beach and a vegetable garden. Vera talks about supervision and control. I might go shopping with Annie for a bathing suit. I might enroll in a course in tax law at the New School. When Annie leaves, I might join Vista finally. Or the 92nd Street Y. Or I might close the door to my quiet house—carefully, from the inside, wearing a pair of white kid gloves with pearl buttons. And resume my life. □

Frederick Barthelme

CUT GLASS



A man in a room in a hotel in a city which is strange to him, a dark room, although it is night: he stands at the window looking out at the lights of the city. He is happy to be alone, although he can imagine being unhappy for the same reason. He loves the carpet in the room, the dresser, the coathangers, the wallpaper, the padded headboard of each double bed. He has not seen the city except from the window; he has avoided every sight pictured in the hotel's Guide to Chicago; he will leave knowing the city no better than when he came.

He will do what he is doing: stand naked in the darkened, rented room and look out the window in peace and quiet and in pleasure.

Now he pushes away from the glass, dials Cold on the climate control, slips into the large bed, and pulls the yellow sheet and the thick spread to a point just below his nostrils.

Watching the local news on television he recalls visiting the city as a young man, recalls walking past a barber shop in which a barber was fighting with a customer. The barber knocked the customer down. Remembering this makes the man want to leave Chicago. He is uneasy. He closes the curtain and returns to bed but cannot sleep, so sits up and stares at himself in the mirror mounted on the opposite wall.

A blonde woman says hello to him in the hallway. Her voice is cracked and slow, her breath is sweet, and when they stand together at the window in his room he marvels at her suppleness. Having noticed the dark pleasant scent of her breath he becomes worried about his own, and the conversation that is carried on is carried on with both of their faces near the glass, their breathing apparent on the pane. When he turns, finally, to brush his lips against her forehead he does not breathe, but she restrains him there, his lips on her skin, and he is forced to exhale into her hair, which smells heavenly.

She laughs then and pulls away, moving toward the dresser to make herself a drink. He watches her back as she skirts the corner of the bed; he admires her; the dress she is wearing is stylish and light, and it moves as if caught by wind as she walks.

"I want to undress now," he says.

"I don't mind."

He starts to unbutton his shirt, wondering if she has told him the truth. When the shirt is open and out of his

pants he feels strongly that she has not, that it is the wrong thing to do, that undressing will reduce the moment if not the whole experience, and he decides not to continue. She asks why he has stopped.

"I'm not used to this. Ordinarily I am alone here."

Light is coming from the bathroom door which is slightly ajar, coming from behind the woman, and he sees that she is lovely in her own shadow.

"Do I make you nervous?"

"Anyone would," he says. Then, thinking that this answer might offend her, he adds: "Yes. You in particular."

"I am nervous too. But it's pleasant, don't you agree? I'll go if you like."

"No. Well—not yet, not yet."

She goes into the bathroom. The man switches the television off and on several times, quickly, then undresses and gets into the bed nearest the window, stretching his legs and feet toward the corners of the mattress.

"Usually I'm here alone," he shouts into the darkness, toward the bathroom.

When she is into the second bed he says "Usually I'm alone," then feels foolish for having repeated himself and pushes his hand out in the direction of the bed she is in. It is an uncomfortable moment because when his hand first reaches her bed she does not know that it is there and he has to pat the mattress to get her attention. Then, after a time, in the darkness of that hotel room in a city with which he is by choice unfamiliar, he feels cool wetness between his fingers and feels her blonde hair softly fallen on his wrist, and he realizes that she is kissing his hand with her tongue, and laughing.

In the morning at the newsstand she says: "This is as far as you go."

"Yes. But I fly a lot. All over. I have a friend to meet today, upstairs."

"A friend?"

"Not a woman."

She leaves and he buys copies of *Domus* and *Abitare* from the clerk and returns to his room, to the chair by the window. He studies the magazines carefully, taking pleasure in the lovely homes on mountainsides, in canyons, homes of very modern design, homes in which plainness is elevated to unbearable beauty.

The woman calls the hotel from her office. He has opened the window and there is the smell of spice, of cinnamon, in the room.

"I'm coming back tonight."

"Good."

"Do you know who is dead? Sartre."

"I know."

"I think it's very curious that Sartre is dead, don't you?"

"I suppose he should be. Dead, I mean."

FREDERICK BARTHELME has published two novels, *War & War*, and *Rangoon*. He directs the writing program at the University of Southern Mississippi and edits Mississippi Review.

"Exactly."

He takes a long bath and goes back to the window with a towel around his waist, a towel draped on his shoulders, and a towel over his head. There are people walking in the street and along the waterfront, brightly colored people, and the wind has shifted, and he can no longer smell the spice.

When she returns they shake hands and then she laughs and pulls him into an embrace, kisses the still-wet hair behind his ears.

"Hello," she finally says.

He notices that she looks tired, that her dark skin is rougher than he remembers, that her hair is more brown than blonde and less well cut than he thought.

"You're marvelous," he says.

She turns from the window. "Thank you."

"My friend," he says, looking past her toward the Hancock silhouette against the closing sky, "my friend is not my friend anymore. He has gone crazy, I think."

She says: "Do you have a cigarette?" and he imagines that she sounds like a wonderful movie actress.

"In my jacket." He is pleased that she will leave her scent in the pocket of his coat.

She stays at the window with both hands in the waistband of her jeans.

"I want to smell your hands," he says.

Smiling she pulls her hands out of her waistband and walks to him holding her hands out palms upward. He takes the hands in his and bends his face to them, smelling the palms, backs, wrists, each in turn, inhaling deeply, slowly, each in turn, until she moves both hands up against his eyes. She holds them there, pressed tight, and he is made acutely aware of the shape of his face, of his cheekbones and the bones over his eyes, and of her hands, slight, almost skeletal, hard.

"I like this very much," he says.

He tells the woman that he has decided to stay in Chicago, that he wants her to stay with him, at the hotel.

"Can I do that?"

"Don't pretend to be silly."

The night is deeply hazed; lights out the window are ringed with glares in which they can see small rainbows. The man and the woman sit on the two beds, talking little; he does not drink so much as he did the first night, she does not drink at all. They sit watching the mist tighten on the glass.

She brings two suitcases and a tote and fills the bathroom with her scents, her perfumes and soaps. The following day, while she is at work, he goes through her things as if they were pieces in a treasure, touching them softly, turning bottles against light, savoring, gently tracing outlines of objects with his fingers.

He is in the bathroom when she returns.

"What's going on?"

"Just a minute," he says through the locked door.

She drops her coat on the chair and her attention is drawn to the view: the day is crisp, even cold, and looking

out the window she realizes that from that vantage it is not possible to tell exactly what the weather is, that it could as well be warm and overcast, or humid, or even bitterly cold, much colder than it actually is. What is most curious to her about this is that something so obvious should have gone unnoticed.

The man comes out of the bathroom with her beige dress.

"Playing with my dress?"

"I want you to wear it again." He drops the dress on the bed behind her.

Automatically unbuttoning her blouse and tugging it loose from her pants, she hands it to him as one might hand a shirt in need of ironing to a valet. "I suppose you'll want this right away."

He stretches out on her bed and drops the blouse over his face. "It looks funny through this," he says. "You're vague-looking."

"Swell. I called at half past three."

"Many magical things happened."

"The message lamp is still blinking."

"Let it blink all night, I like it."

"Why do you stay here? It gets on my nerves, it already gets on my nerves. It doesn't work like this, people don't do things this way."

"They would if they could."

"You can't even tell what the weather's like."

"Sure I can; it's cold. I felt the glass."

"It's not just the weather, for God's sake."

They sit in silence. He watches the goosebumps appear on her naked shoulders, then disappear, then appear again; she looks out the window at the graying sky.

When he wakes up the next morning she is packing.

"I don't understand," he says.

"You understand."

"Right, I understand. But I think you're wrong."

He sits up in bed and sniffs the air, twists his head back and forth. "The smell, the scent—is that you?"

"Who else?"

"No, I mean it's new, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Where'd you get it? Was it here?"

"Bought it yesterday, downstairs."

"It's wonderful," he says. "Everything we need right in the building."

She kisses him softly on the cheek and he holds her, puts his arms around her.

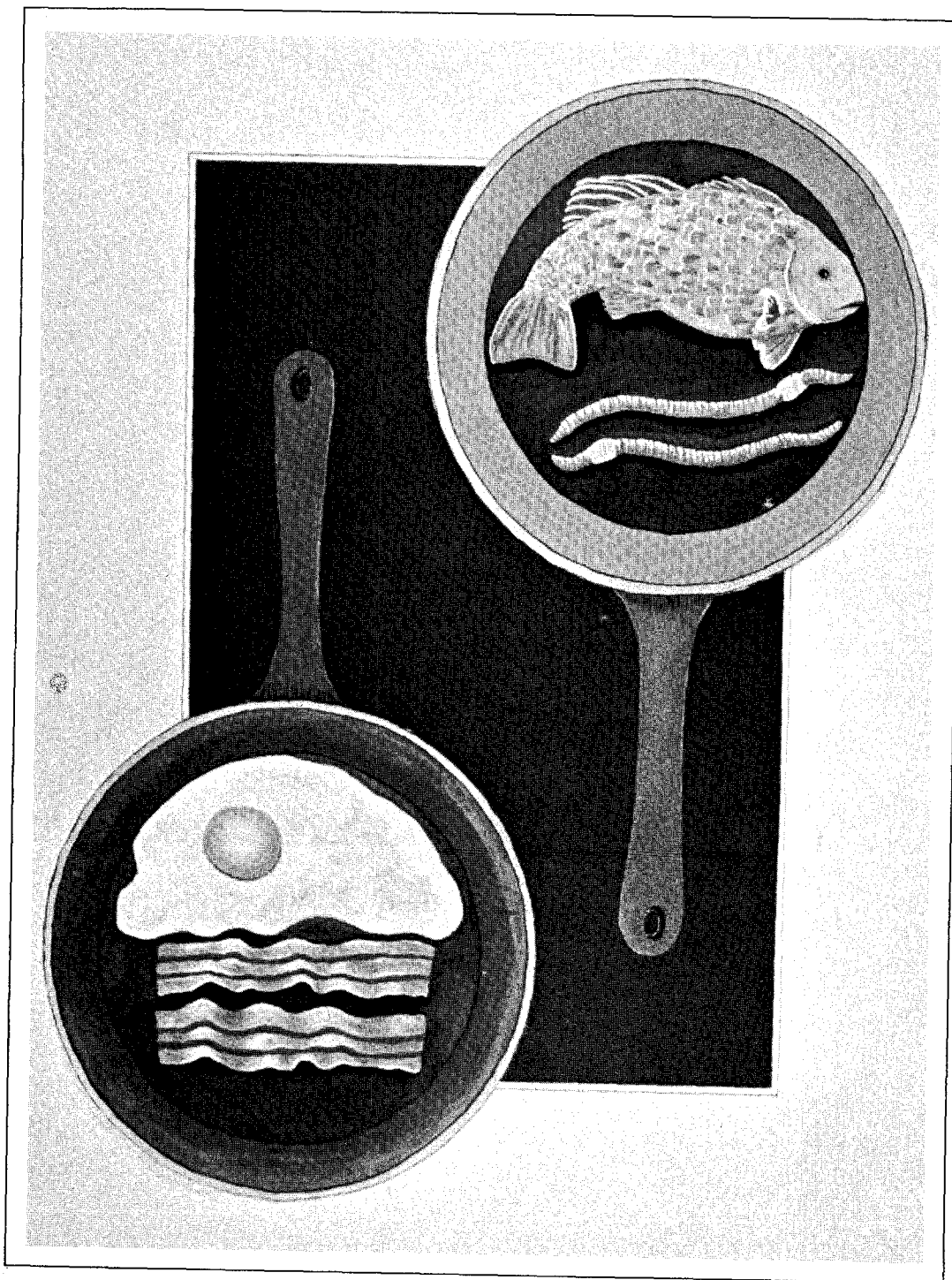
"This is awkward," he says.

She pulls free of him and walks to the door. He looks at the window, stares at it, at its whiteness and the way it seems to push itself into the room.

"It's very pretty," he says. "To see it close like this is very pretty."

She lines her cases at the door and takes a last look at the room. It is snowing. Flat spots of white slip down and across the window. The buildings of the city are obscured by the dense snow and the glass has the look of a wall. She dials room service then sits beside the man on the bed, and they wait, and the bellman comes, and she gives him bills, and he takes the bags away. □

THE 3:52.6-MINUTE SHORT STORY



Mary Peterson

CRAZY LADY

She had a PhD in Philosophy and two Master's Degrees, but they didn't stop her from being the town's crazy lady. Maybe they even helped. She was smart enough to be inventively crazy, and she always knew when they were going to commit her to the State Hospital again. Perhaps there was a line she knew about, and she crossed it when she decided to.

She lived in a small white clapboard house with green shutters, on Main Street, tucked neatly between two larger colonial houses and directly down from Flo's Steamed Hot Dogs and Arnie's Real Italian Pizza. The house had a rickety rose trellis over the door. The houses staunchly on either side were really lawyers' offices. Maybe that was appropriate.

Even with the bushes, and although her house was set back some distance from the road, people could still see the things she did to the lawn. She left the front door and back door wide open in any weather. She dressed the elm tree with a toga of sheet. She hung politicians' signs upside down in rows next to the front door. She found a blue sign that read "Bernie's Feeds" and nailed it over her window. She took the television set out to the side lawn and tried to bury it with a shovel, but there were too many roots and she couldn't dig deeply enough. So she left it there, antenna askew, the shovel stuck into the dirt upright.

Early in the summer, when she went bad crazy, her lawn was positively garlanded with toilet paper fluttering wildly from the tree branches, and balanced in one tree was a startling pink umbrella. People said, "What's the umbrella for?" But nobody knew. Then somebody said at Jimmy's Store that she was talking about the Viet Cong, and maybe she put things around her house for protection. But nobody knew what protection a pink umbrella would provide.

Townpeople saw her out walking every day, always heading in a new direction, and they avoided her when they could. If she saw a person she would stop and talk, and nothing she said made sense. Sometimes she chattered in Latin, or French. Sometimes she left notes for people on their doors, but even the town doctor—who understood Latin—could make no sense of the notes.

She usually wore a scarf and a trench coat, sometimes a long grey sweater. She was perhaps 58 or 60, but from behind she looked like a slim-hipped girl. Her walk had the forward urgency of someone on important business. She thrust her head and clenched her fists. She clenched her face within the babushka of scarf too; it was lined and tight, tense with the pressure of whatever went on in her mind. A thin face, and old-looking. You could almost guess her age when you looked at her head-on. Perhaps

she could have been beautiful. She had astonishing, insistent bones. Perhaps she could have been striking. She looked rather like an artist. Like a weaver. Her little thin legs had rosy muscles and so did her arms.

The people who were most afraid of her were probably of two types: those who were so proper-polite they couldn't tell her to go away when she stopped them on the street; and the artists. There weren't many good artists in town—three writers, a sculptor, and only two good painters (the rest of the painters, and there were many, weren't good at all and they were most outspoken about being artists, and they showed their work every summer in an open outdoor festival on the Meeting House lawn). The real artists were bothered by her in different ways that may have added up to the same way:

Perhaps the writers were reminded of their dreams. The dreams they couldn't shake when they woke first thing in the morning—when the house grew a tiller and set sail out of the harbor; when the tower spouted flames around the screaming family; when the swarthy rapist pursued from behind and clutched like a dog on the gravelly shopping center parking lot.

Perhaps the sculptor was reminded of the draped sheet of the covered object in his studio. It was unfinished. He was a practical worker and always finished everything, but that one tugged and nagged at him even when he had dinner with his kind, patient wife and his quiet, intelligent children. If he could only get the shape behind the drape to take form, then something very important would be finished. Formlessness was terrifying to him.

Perhaps the painters were uneasy about letting the public see their work, perhaps they were angry with poor attention that made people shake their heads, and scratch their jaws, and leave without noticing the quality of color in the foreground, the careful details that brought a subject coherently together in a frame. The crazy lady's lawn was like details without order; the eye skidded all over the place and never found a home. It was unbearable.

The artists in town were not very good friends, and probably never spoke to each other about it. They all had astonishing egos and bitter little insecurities, and they were loath to confess anything to anybody.

As for the proper-polite people, they let her stop and talk her gibberish while they looked around helplessly for rescue. Sooner or later somebody would come along and say to the crazy lady, "Harriet, knock it off. You're bothering people." Like magic she would shake her head and pull her grubby trench coat closer around her little bird body, and shuffle off muttering down the street.

People in town had seen her do most everything: walk into a restaurant and come quickly out again within a minute, as though somebody had thrown her out. Stand in the post office for three hours filling out change of address cards. Sneak home the back way through overgrown vacant property. Pick up things along the road and shove them into her pockets.

And everybody knew she smelled terrible. They were sure of that.

Her daughter, who lived in town but refused to try to do anything with her mother, said, "She's always been



crazy, but worse the last few years. She has pills—just one in the morning and she's fine. But she won't take them. I don't know why. Maybe she likes being the town's crazy lady."

Somebody said, *A person ought to be careful of what they wish for, because of course it will come true.*

Her daughter said she hadn't known her father well either, and when he shot himself in that very little house five years ago, while her mother was institutionalized upstate, she wasn't even sad. "How could I be?" she said. "I didn't speak to him for years. He was a stranger." She said her brother felt guilty but was a weakling and wouldn't have anything to do with his mother. "He just pretends she doesn't exist," the daughter said.

Earlier in the summer, when the crazy lady was getting worse, she made friends with a halfwit in town and spent hours a day with her. But the halfwit finally couldn't stand her either, and threw her out. After that, she took to wandering around town in her trench coat and finally she did not put on clothing under the trench coat, and walked into Jimmy's Store and the Econo Gas Station and the Mariner Bar and opened the coat and was picked up by the police within a day for "indecent exposure."

Later in the summer, when she was back from the State Hospital, she was good for a while. Children stopped, for a while, calling her the witch. Mothers forgot to warn their children to avoid her house. But sure as the weather, in September she started to go off her nut again and began to redecorate the front lawn. And threatened a respectable woman in town with burning. And in a day was found on that woman's spacious front porch lighting little fires and smiling to herself. She was trucked off again

by the police who spoke afterward of the smell of her, and that she probably hadn't had a bath all summer.

Her daughter, who meant to leave town for California, stayed a while to clean up the house. She saw the television on the lawn and the shovel next to it. She put them inside. Also the sheet around the tree and the upsidedown political signs, and the boxes set on end and the gatherings of tindery sticks and rotten vegetables. She took the knives out of the trees. She told people her mother must have known she was going away soon, because the kitchen was cleaned spotless although the other rooms were a disaster.

Maybe when the artists drove past they noticed that the house was orderly again, and they felt something relax inside. They would never have to speak of it.

Maybe the polite people could finish a cup of coffee at Jimmy's in the morning, and walk on errands, since she wouldn't tag along embarrassing them. They were safe, too.

Somebody said, *Even a true story has a moral now and then.*

When the daughter was cleaning outside, she noticed a powerful and rancid smell. It took a long time to locate. Finally she saw a decayed cat's head—mostly bone, a little fur—lying in the bird feeder.

She threw it in the trash.

And made a mental note to tell her mother, if she saw her again, one should never feed cats to birds if one lives on Main Street. □

MARY PETERSON is a contributing editor to this magazine, and teaches at the University of New Hampshire.

A COMB AND A SNAKE

Janice Eidus

During an argument, she threw his metal comb into the toilet bowl and flushed. Her husband turned red. "You loon," he muttered. "Now the toilet will be stopped up, and for what? What did you prove?"

A week later, she decided to start spending more time alone, *doing* things, rediscovering herself. Her husband agreed that time alone might be beneficial for her—perhaps the one lacking ingredient. "Someone whose diet lacks one vitamin," he elaborated, "initially requires *massive* doses to compensate." An article she'd recently come across in her favorite magazine reinforced the decision. While they spoke, she went from room to room watering—carefully not *overwatering*—her many plants which so infested the apartment that drapes and chairs were chosen to match.

She spent the next Saturday wandering through the city, following the plan which had been outlined in the magazine—the Whitney, the Barbizon Coffee Shop, a new Mexican crafts boutique. By late afternoon, she was walking closer to the buildings, starting at loud noises. When darkness fell, she entered a theatre on Third Avenue to see a new film which had been reviewed in the same issue of the magazine. The movie ended on a sour note, with the heroine tearfully choosing to have an abortion. Immediately she was out the door of the theatre, hailing a taxi, conscious of weakness in her legs, of the sudden rain splattering and frizzing her long hair, of the dangers of dark city streets.

Her husband was watching Audie Murphy on Channel Five, eating applesauce in the dark. "All right," he said, placing his bowl and spoon upon the table.

JANICE EIDUS was a winner in last year's Redbook Young Writers Contest, lives in Albany, NY, and is working on her first novel.

She trembled (although she'd been gone less than a full day) for the African Violet, caressing first a leaf, then the stem.

They went to bed.

Still, the comb had been flushed, and the toilet now continually overflowed. Going to the bathroom in the mornings and evenings had become so harrowing that between the hours of nine and five, while at their respective jobs, they relished the use of office facilities.

She resisted calling the landlord, although her husband wanted to. The landlord lived on the ground floor, and at the age of eighty-six still performed all repairs himself. "I'm not trusting blacks," he would say when an impatient tenant demanded either more professional or more expedient service. "Move across the street if you want blacks playing with your things."

One morning the landlord approached her. "So you got a comb stuck."

She was climbing the stairs, carrying a newly purchased hair rinse she'd seen advertised on television; her husband was jogging in the park. "One of our little nephews threw it down, we couldn't stop him in time."

The next morning the landlord arrived, uncalled for, bearing what he called his "snake-tool."

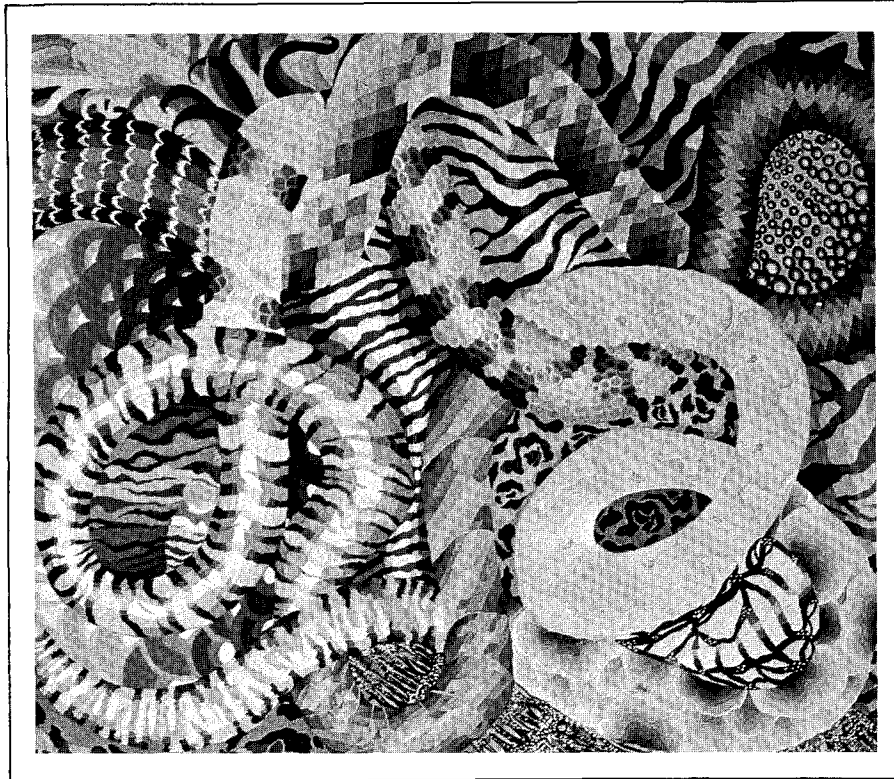
"My nephew . . ." she began.

"Nah! Your husband already told me it was you in some kind of fit."

At noon her husband returned from the barber shop. He had forgotten to stop at "The Greenery" for a new flowerpot.

"The landlord was here, but he couldn't get the comb out," she told him, noting immediately the one flyaway hair in his trimmed mustache. "He said it won't require a plumber, though. He pushed it down, or something."

"He's lying. It's a *metal* comb—it might mean the total



removal of the tank! *We* sure as hell can't afford to pay for that!"

They borrowed the landlord's snake one day when he was out. Clumped dark hairs attached themselves to the snake, but no comb.

"They're yours," her husband said.

She wanted to swoon. White tiles, white walls, dark hairs . . . why didn't someone just call a plumber?

He shoved the snake in farther, turning it around and around and around, hoping to somehow connect with the metal comb. "This is absurd," he blurted, instantly sorry.

The snake became a permanent fixture, never asked for by the landlord. Once a week, at least, her husband had to swish it about, just to insure that the flush-mechanism worked at all.

"The landlord told me that you were embarrassed to admit it was you who threw the comb down there," her husband mentioned one night as they lay in bed, both sweating and irritated because of the heat and the noise of fire engines. "You should have admitted it."

She said nothing, thinking about the survival of her more fragile plants during such a heat spell, dreading ugly brown patches.

"I know he's furious," he went on, "because he's beginning to see that we'll need outside help."

The next morning, the toilet belched and bubbled.

"You do it for once," her husband decided, thrusting the snake into her hands.

Almost immediately she heard the click and knew that somehow the horizontal metal comb had at long last attached itself to the coiled metal snake. Impossible—physically impossible—but true. She twisted the handle in circles until the comb began surfacing. Her husband was silent. The only sound was iron against porcelain.

The comb was sparkling, and during its immersion had radically altered in appearance: no longer straight and

pointed, each tooth of the comb had been transformed into a distinct letter of the alphabet, together boldly completing two separate words and one obvious mark of punctuation—

LEAVE NOW!

—causing her, right there on the spot, to nod just once, ferociously, at her husband.

He stood still, with his arms at his sides in his own bathroom, beginning to make silent plans to equally divide the furniture and appliances, to readjust to the bachelor's life: advertisements for Liberated Singles, "personals" from widows and divorcees, frozen French Toast breakfasts.

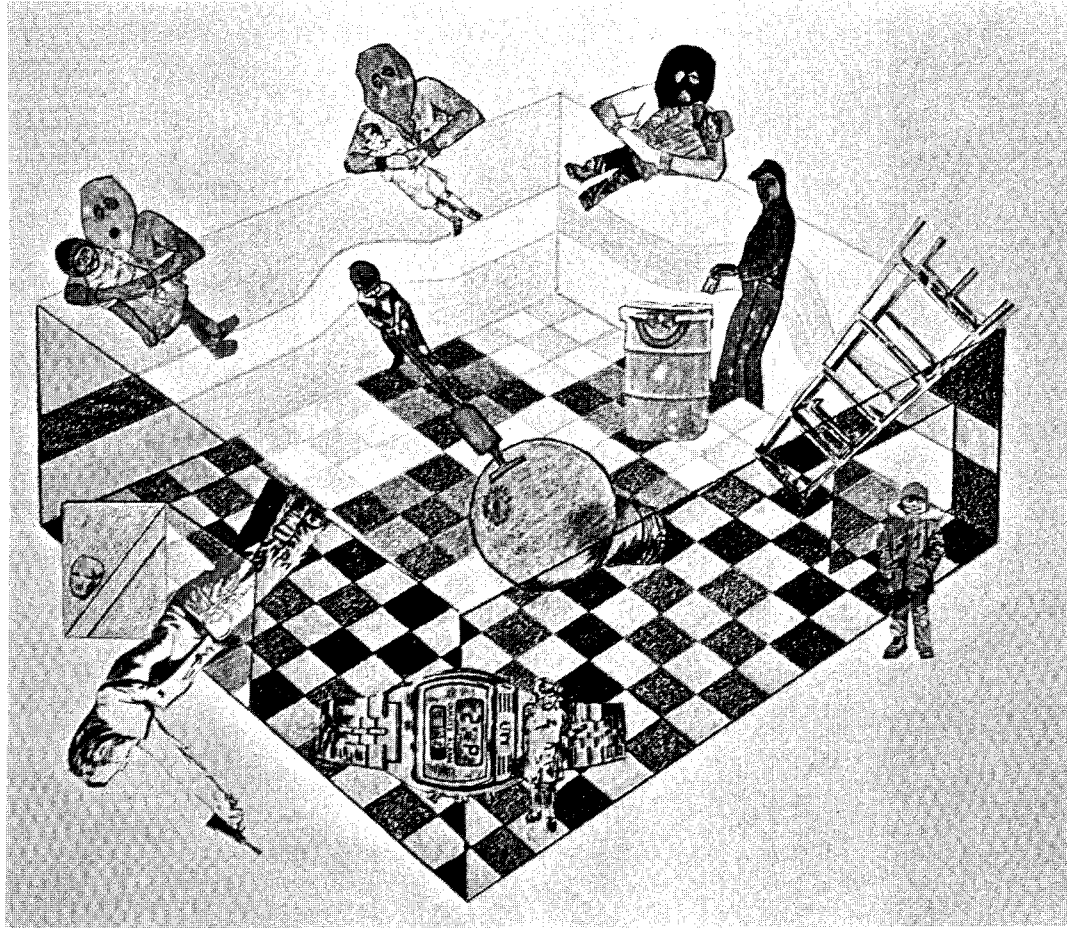
She knew, and he knew, that although there had not been anything *specifically* wrong, that although there was no one evening to which she would absolutely be able to point an insightful finger years later in an analyst's office, still, once a comb and a snake have spoken so precisely and clearly to even a vaguely unhappy wife, it is no longer a matter of an imbalanced diet, of too much protein, not enough carbohydrates, starches and Vitamin E.

She felt herself destined and eager to be off: ready to pack up her dresses, shoes, pocketbooks, the natural bristle hairbrush, even the tortoise shell hairclips (an anniversary gift). The plants would go to friends and relatives. She would learn to be content without the green leaves and purple buds each morning, without the bright ceramic watering can beside her bed. Perhaps she'd buy some jersey turtlenecks, cut her hair in a freer style.

Almost simultaneously they took deep breaths, after which, both feeling suddenly elated and ravenous, they nearly *ran* side by side into the kitchen, where she hurriedly concocted a fruit salad with whatever she could find in the refrigerator: figs, bananas, oranges, apples. They took large bites, gulped air and water, and then took larger and larger bites. □

T. Coraghessan Boyle

THE HIT MAN



Early Years

The Hit Man's early years are complicated by the black bag which he wears over his head. Teachers correct his pronunciation, the coach criticizes his attitude, the principal dresses him down for branding preschoolers with a lit cigarette. He is a poor student. At lunch he sits alone, feeding bell peppers and salami into the dark slot of his mouth. In the hallways, wiry young athletes snatch at the black hood and slap the back of his head. When he is thirteen he is approached by the captain of the football team, who pins him down and attempts to remove the hood. The Hit Man wastes him. Five years, says the judge.

Back on the Street

The Hit Man is back on the street in two months.

First Date

The girl's name is Cynthia. The Hit Man pulls up in front of her apartment in his father's hearse. (The Hit Man's father, whom he loathes and abominates, is a mor-

tician. At breakfast the Hit Man's father had slapped the cornflakes from his son's bowl. The son threatened to waste his father. He did not, restrained no doubt by considerations of filial loyalty and the deep-seated taboos against patricide which permeate the universal unconscious.)

Cynthia's father has silver sideburns and plays tennis. He responds to the Hit Man's knock, expresses surprise at the Hit Man's appearance. The Hit Man takes Cynthia by the elbow, presses a twenty into her father's palm, and disappears into the night.

Father's Death

At breakfast the Hit Man slaps the cornflakes from his father's bowl. Then wastes him.

Mother's Death

The Hit Man is in his early 20's. He shoots pool, lifts weights and drinks milk from the carton. His mother is in the hospital, dying of cancer or heart disease. The priest wears black. So does the Hit Man.

First Job

Porfirio Buñoz, a Cuban financier, invites the Hit Man to lunch. I hear you're looking for work, says Buñoz. That's right, says the Hit Man.

Peas

The Hit Man does not like peas. They are too difficult to balance on the fork.

Talk Show

The Hit Man waits in the wings, the white slash of a cigarette scarring the midnight black of his head and upper torso. The makeup girl has done his mouth and eyes, brushed the nap of his hood. He has been briefed. The guest who precedes him is a pediatrician. A planetary glow washes the stage where the host and the pediatrician, separated by a potted palm, cross their legs and discuss the little disturbances of infants and toddlers.

After the station break the Hit Man finds himself squeezed into a director's chair, white lights in his eyes. The talk-show host is a baby-faced man in his early forties. He smiles like God and all His Angels. Well, he says. So you're a hit man. Tell me—I've always wanted to know—what does it feel like to hit someone?

Death of Mateo María Buñoz

The body of Mateo María Buñoz, the cousin and business associate of a prominent financier, is discovered down by the docks on a hot summer morning. Mist rises from the water like steam, there is the smell of fish. A large black bird perches on the dead man's forehead.

Marriage

Cynthia and the Hit Man stand at the altar, side by side. She is wearing a white satin gown and lace veil. The Hit Man has rented a tuxedo, extra-large, and a silk-lined black-velvet hood.

... Till death do you part, says the priest.

Moods

The Hit Man is moody, unpredictable. Once, in a luncheonette, the waitress brought him the meatloaf special but forgot to eliminate the peas. There was a spot of gravy on the Hit Man's hood, about where his chin should be. He looked up at the waitress, his eyes like pins behind the triangular slots, and wasted her.

Another time he went to the track with \$25, came back with \$1800. He stopped at a cigar shop. As he stepped out of the shop a wino tugged at his sleeve and solicited a quarter. The Hit Man reached into his pocket, extracted the \$1800 and handed it to the wino. Then wasted him.

First Child

A boy. The Hit Man is delighted. He leans over the edge of the playpen and molds the tiny fingers around the grip of a nickel-plated derringer. The gun is loaded with blanks—the Hit Man wants the boy to get used to the noise. By the time he is four the boy has mastered the

rudiments of Tae Kwon Do, can stick a knife in the wall from a distance of ten feet and shoot a moving target with either hand. The Hit Man rests his broad palm on the boy's head. You're going to make the Big Leagues, Tiger, he says.

Work

He flies to Cincinnati. To L.A. To Boston. To London. The stewardesses get to know him.

Half an Acre and a Garage

The Hit Man is raking leaves, amassing great brittle piles of them. He is wearing a black T-shirt, cut-off at the shoulders, and a cotton work hood, also black. Cynthia is edging the flowerbed, his son playing in the grass. The Hit Man waves to his neighbors as they drive by. The neighbors wave back.

When he has scoured the lawn to his satisfaction, the Hit Man draws the smaller leaf-hummocks together in a single mound the size of a pickup truck. Then he bends to ignite it with his lighter. Immediately, flames leap back from the leaves, cut channels through the pile, engulf it in a ball of fire. The Hit Man stands back, hands folded beneath the great meaty biceps. At his side is the three-headed dog. He bends to pat each of the heads, smoke and sparks raging against the sky.

Stalking the Streets of the City

He is stalking the streets of the city, collar up, brim down. It is late at night. He stalks past department stores, small businesses, parks and gas stations. Past apartments, picket fences, picture windows. Dogs growl in the shadows, then slink away. He could hit any of us.

Retirement

A group of businessman-types—sixtyish, seventyish, portly, diamond rings, cigars, liver spots—throws him a party. Porfirio Buñoz, now in his eighties, makes a speech and presents the Hit Man with a gilded scythe. The Hit Man thanks him, then retires to the lake, where he can be seen in his speedboat, skating out over the blue, hood rippling in the breeze.

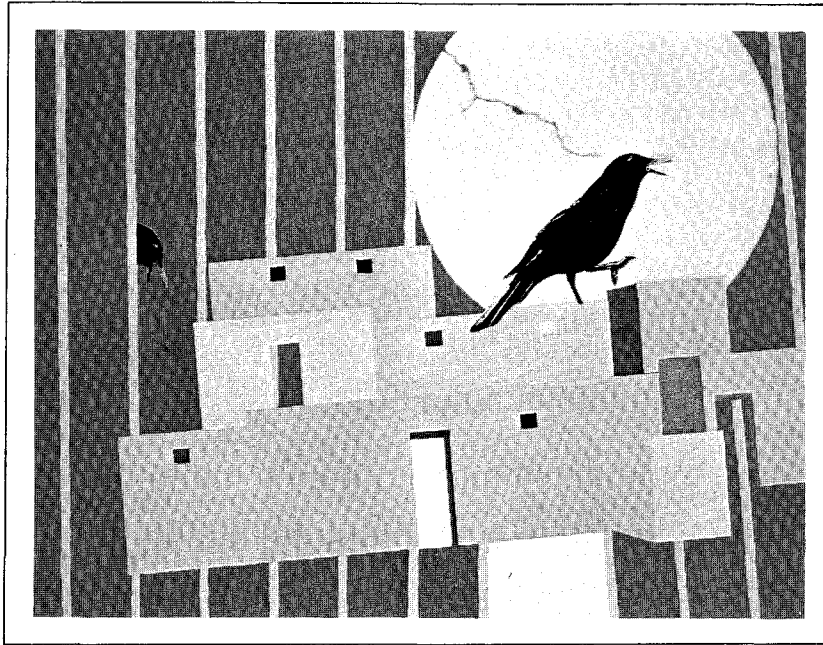
Death

He is stricken, shrunken, half his former self. He lies propped against the pillows at Mercy Hospital, a bank of gentians drooping round the bed. Tubes run into the hood at the nostril openings, his eyes are clouded and red, sunk deep behind the triangular slots. The priest wears black. So does the Hit Man.

On the other side of town the Hit Man's son is standing before the mirror of a shop which specializes in Hit Man attire. Trying on his first hood. □

T. CORAGHESSAN BOYLE is the author of Descent of Man (stories), *published by Atlantic Monthly Press, and a novel, Water Music, portions of which are appearing in* Paris Review.

Trina M. Hikel
UNDER WARRANTY



Kansas. J driving, I staying high and photographing pastel colors of sky and wheat, blue, pale straw, peapod green; black plowed earth; big billboards and signs; the biggest sky. I take pictures of Holiday Inn signs for my mother who worries about me from her office desk in a Holiday Inn in Bangor, a time zone away. I tell J: little did I ever dream that the nation's innkeeper would someday mean Mom to me. He smiles. We haven't been together long; he's never met my mother. On the radio: 'Beast of burden'; the same old rock'n'roll in every city, every little town across the country. I feel good. J drives silently. Says he's happy when I ask how he feels. I can't get much out of him. He drives and drives; the little bus chugs along. We smoke, watch the horizon, listen to music. Hours and hours stretching ahead. I babble and take pictures at 55 mph. Nature and advertising. Cornfields and wheatfields. Road signs: Burgers. Steaks. Fried chicken. GENUINE INDIAN BURIAL. Welcome to Manhattan. Many service stations.

We have trouble with the bus in WaKeeny; no VW places around; a fat redcheeked farmer in old overalls and pointy cowboy boots waddles over while J has his hands in the engine and gives us useless semi-friendly advice, looking us over good, taking us in: a mixed couple, J with his long silky hair, mirror shades, ancient burial jade pendant gleaming outside his black t-shirt; and me, dark, frizzy-haired; my own travel wear: brown lipstick, fatigues, a skimpy black undershirt with nothing underneath. Obviously passing through. J tinkers a bit and we get going. We chug toward Denver. The bus is losing power fast. I am unperturbed; I predicted a breakdown

TRINA HIKEL has arrived in Berkeley via Maine, Radcliffe, and work in Boston. The story printed here is from a collection nearing completion.

before we left Maine when I saw parts of engine, grubby-looking and greasy, spread out all over the barn floor. J seems upset, nervous. Why should he be? He's got credit cards. I put soothing jazz tapes on and try to cheer him up. I tell him: men completely lose their sense of humor in a crisis; women rarely do. That's because once you're a woman, everything else looks funny in comparison. He doesn't laugh; frowns instead. I change the tape. Jagger growls 'Stop breakin down!' J permits himself a smile at this. We pass a gasoline sign that says FINA and I tell him the story it reminds me of: One hot day last spring I took the subway to the beach, got off at Orient Heights which had a singles' end, mostly young women spaced out along the sand with books, like me, sleeping in the sun and looking at the young guys on the handball courts. Water too dirty to swim in. Airport noise and exhaust. I would read and snooze, smoke a j, write in my notebooks, go home just before it got chilly. On the train back that day: a bunch of 15, 16-year-olds coming from Revere Beach, three stops up the line, where a younger crowd hung out. Beachbags, frisbees, tans. Healthy-looking. Spiffy. Didn't talk with the local accent. Segregated by sex: boys on one side of the car, girls on the other. One boy, the cutest—blond fluff, golden tan, lithe build—in the middle of the car doing flips and pullups on the standee straps, showing off, making the others laugh. We were all laughing. He kept yelling FI-NA, FI-NAAH! and showing off his precious bod. The girls loved it. Boys looked envious. The conductor came out and told him to sit down, and he did. The train went into the tunnel beneath Boston Harbor, little blue rickety train flying along, rattling loud. The boy, sitting with the boys, started banging his head against the window in back of him, bam bam bam, competing with the noise of the train, still yelling FI-NA, FI-NAAH. He kept it up and it wasn't funny, looked painful. One of the girls said cut it OUT, you'll break the

glass. One of the boys said don't worry it's plexiglass, can't break. Just then, bam bam BAM the boy's head went right through the glass, shattering it. General hoots and howls, then silence. The train stopped right there in the tunnel and the conductor came out and collared the boy who was bleeding, dazed. When the conductor quit yelling at him and started up the train, the boy sat down again, embarrassed, deflated, abashed; looked through his eyelashes at the people in the car who were all looking at him and croaked in a very small voice, 'Fi-na.'

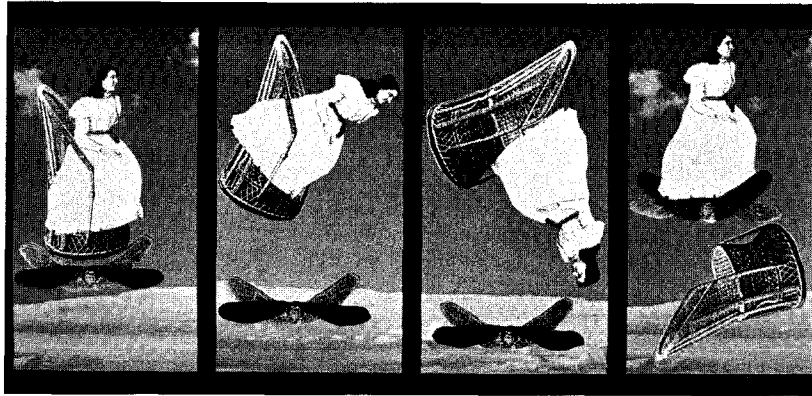
We limp into Denver on three cylinders. Leave the bus up on a lift in Arvada with all our crosscountry stuff in the care of some cowboy mechanics whose assurance that they know what they're doing is enough for me. We hoof it toward Denver with a map and cameras and clean shirts in a duffel. We find a bus into town and walk around looking for a hotel. J is bummed out, silent, unsmiling. I find the Holiday Inn and use their Holidex message system to tell my mother where I am. Reply: BANGOR ACCEPTS. The Holiday Inn is in the expensive part of town so we head to the cheap part which looks mostly Mexican. One or two Chinese restaurants. We take heart; keep looking. Many hotels are closed and boarded up. J is acting apprehensive, nervous, fretful, and he isn't saying anything, but I feel tough like a cowgirl—this is Denver and my bootheels ring reassuringly on the sidewalk. On one deserted block we see a sign: The Bean Hotel. Shabby-looking and I think we can do better but J is giving up, hungry and tired, so we go in. Sign saying OFFICE directs us up worn stairs into a hall: linoleum, tacky paneling, foot-square mirror tiles covering one wall, a dutch door into the office. A very old man signs us in, looks at my signature, says teasingly, I can't read that, wheredya learn to write like that? I grin at him and say, in college. On the line that says 'address' I write 'Route 70 west'. In the room: a big bed, bureau, TV console, washbasin. No rug. Shower and toilet behind a door. Glaring recessed fluorescent light box overhead. Mirror tiles everywhere: on three walls, on the headboard of the bed. Startling at first. I turn off the overheads and turn on a small pink bulb over the sink. Better. We settle our few things in the room and head out for dinner. The old man looks surprised at seeing us leave right away; used to different methods.

Dark outside. J says he needs rice so we go to a place called The Mandarin which turns out to be Japanese. We look at the menu. He describes the dishes and orders them with confident pronunciation on which I compliment him; he smiles and demonstrates further proficiency: counts to ten in Japanese. Says he learned from his oldest friend in San Francisco, a Japanese boy whom he taught Chinese in return. He tells me a few things about the boy and his family, the most he's said all day long. I will meet them. In return I tell him about my oldest friend in Skowhegan, Maine, a half-Japanese boy, my kindergarten romance, a beautiful smart agile boy who dressed up as Zorro and gave me crystal gardens in jars for my seventh birthday and who later grew tall and hunched and incapable, afraid, and hanged himself on his 21st birthday. My friend who died. The memories and the telling spell me

with a light gloom. J says nothing, he does not comfort or sympathize. Is he jealous? Soup arrives. We eat; I recover myself, a purely mechanical trick; I see that he is silent, tense; I tell him to cheer up. I am getting sick of the sound of my own voice. He says he's worried about the bus. Is he lying? Is there something else? Petulantly I dig him about his moods being so dependent on the state of his engine. He points out that it's his two hundred bucks being spent on repairs. I point out that he's lucky to have the two hundred bucks to spend. He replies that he'd rather spend it on me. I laugh outright at this reflex gallantry. That's my last word. He pays for dinner. That's his.

We walk entwined back to the hotel sharing a thin j on the way. Mile high in Denver. I babble on critically about the appearance of the city, complaining about its solid cold steel and stone vocabulary, then remember that I shouldn't force my visions on him. Then we walk in silence through the empty streets. I feel lonely and tired, regret having committed myself to three thousand miles and more with another speechless American male. Then I think, what the hell, I can always leave if I don't like it. I pull myself back to the moment, and trusting it, relax and open myself to this man. I think he is still out of sorts, feeling strange, worried, thrown off, unsure of me as well as of everything else. I relent; I sympathize out of liking him; I wish him to feel good. I tell him this. He says, thanks babe. We go up to our room, settle in, wash. The TV doesn't work. We fling off our clothes and go to bed bringing the map and a guidebook with us. I choreograph tomorrow for him, let him see the framework we have to play in: time and distances, repair schedule, streets, bus routes, art shows, meals out. He sees my design—pleasure—and catches my enthusiasm, laughs, throws his arms around me, exclaims, I love you! He clears the bed of papers, turns the light off. Moonlight and streetlight. He draws me close to him and throws off the covers, whispers 'Look' and we see ourselves in the mirrors. We are both very dark; summer tans. I think we look beautiful. He reaches into the duffel beside the bed and brings out a bottle of cognac. I laugh; it's the only thing he will drink. He uncorks the bottle, hands it to me with a small elegant bow, watches me drink. We each take a few nips. We settle down further into the bed, bodies touching comfortably; we were friends first. He is thinking this too: 'My friend' he muses, taking my hand. Residual rock 'n' roll in my head and a story spinning itself to life, but I refrain: a woman who talks in stories must leave room for others who talk in words, syllables. I admire him with my eyes, waiting, listening, giving him a chance to reveal himself. He approves with his eyes, with a fraction of a nod, are we communicating? In the night he seems open. He is so beautiful in this light, my heart beats faster, is he what he looks like? He moves closer, we kiss, he begins to show me what he's like, no words, and I watch and listen and feel, without words I ask more. We are still new to each other, fresh, hot, we are still in love. He invokes my name in a whisper, *Tazmin*, *Tazmin*, and I shiver and he speaks directly in my ear, *Stay with me*, a command, *stay with me*. I do not argue. Rebellious but intrigued, I say nothing at all. We listen in silence when we do not know if we like what we are hearing. □

John Gerlach SIMPSON AMONG ANGELS



Simpson, a guest at a cocktail party honoring a friend's retirement, finds himself among angels. The one by a window faces a young woman whose dress reveals virtually all of her back, and a fine back it is. Red pendants on her ears bobble as she chats. Another angel, scooping almonds from a dish by the sofa, smiles in response to Simpson's stare. The lady with the fine back and pendants laughs seductively. Simpson wonders if angels flirt.

For the next three days Simpson remains indoors. Aspirin, Roloids, and herb tea have not dispelled his malaise, and he feels foolish for having taken anything at all. The sky has been overcast and there are stipples on the puddle in the driveway. He knows it's raining even though he hasn't seen the rain fall. Why can't he bring his feelings to words? Lately language has seemed parched and inadequate. He has become as inarticulate as the cat, which has been motivated as long as he's had it only to try to reach the ceiling, and lately it has given up even that. It sits unmoving and simply regards. Simpson is grateful: he has had enough of its scaling the drapes and clawing its way up the front of the fireplace to rest on the mantle.

That evening in a restaurant of high repute, Simpson dawdles over dinner. Before him sits Pompano en Papillote, tiny potatoes, and zucchini sprinkled with parmesan cheese. He is unable to identify any of it, though all of it seems familiar. A lady to his left, recently come from Spain, turns and haltingly confesses that she is in love with the English language. Simpson, touched, shares with her several adverbs and adjectives, a few prepositions, and a possessive pronoun. Perhaps English is after all an adequate vehicle. For the next two days the sky is a brilliant blue, and the cat sits on the porch in its porcelain pose, blinking at the first buds of spring.

A week later Simpson makes his annual visit to the Buick showroom. The air is thick with the clunk of closing doors resonating over the freshly waxed linoleum. He is at the brink of a purchase, an Electra sedan, when he starts—those figures by the blue Skylark coupe—are they

angels? Surely he imagines. As the salesman approaches him he slips through the side door. For the next few days instead of retreating he forces himself to public places—the zoo, museums, the parks. Within the week he is overtaken on the golf course by the angels, wishing to play through. They act as if they had been drinking since the first hole. As Simpson opens his mouth to speak, the words stick in his throat. He bogies the next two holes and loses count on the last.

The next few months he spends largely indoors. He drifts, reflects. Sometimes it seems as if each day has been the Fourth of July, and small children wearing fireman's hats and waving tiny flags have ridden bicycles decorated with streamers up the street, screaming with delight; other times it seems as if none of this happens at all. In an effort to settle himself he moves in with his sister Louisa. Still there are questions: will the cat, left at home, rub against the leg of Mrs. Caliguire, come to feed her, or attack, as it did the Feeney girl? And his new situation: Louisa, nearly deaf the last ten years, insists that she doesn't remember inviting him. Nevertheless, she and her husband have been gracious to a fault. They do all they can at Scrabble, accepting his words without question, and do not gloat as they trounce him.

At twilight one evening, Simpson sits with a French grammar in an orchard at the back of Louisa's yard. He reads until the light fails the page, discovering phrases forgotten since school days. French unfolds before him as never before, an arid field surprised by rain. As crickets begin to chirp he eases himself with the recollection of a day as blue as a little girl's dress. When Louisa calls, he is the one who plays deaf. Moments later there is a murmur in the trees. The angels appear, bright as apples, several with wicker baskets and one with a white tablecloth. The one with the tablecloth recognizes Simpson and lifts his hand.

"Voudriez-vous donc nous accompagner?"

Simpson rises, elated. The breeze swirling about him, he spreads his arms to greet the visitors and his hands detach, float free. He has begun to liquefy. Silently, invisibly, he and the angels depart. Should Louisa remember to search for him as the night deepens, she will find only the moon and the crickets' chirp. □

JOHN GERLACH teaches at Cleveland State University. Other fiction of his has appeared in Ohio Review and Ascent.

Like most stories, this one begins in bed—naturally enough, most of us in America having come to consciousness hospitalized. It's a common theory that American men marry their mothers. If it's also a common practice, one doesn't get very far, does one? One need hardly change the sheets.

By the way, this is another article about running. You see, this one begins in bed with a magazine: not *Playboy* or *Oui*, a barbershop's idea of a literary magazine, but *Sports Illustrated*, a snake-oil salesman's notion of athletics. *SI* is as formulaic as any, in between its ads for lung cancer, but occasionally it outdoes itself with a feature piece about an athletic event that happens but once in a while and/or plays to little or no audience.

The good article I'm reading in the winter of 1978 is about a Hawaiian cardiologist, Jack Scaff, who blusters and browbeats his patients into running. For health only, he dangles before them the prospect of finishing a marathon, even *surviving* a marathon. In bed, I am easily deceived.

The marathon, as most people now know, is a run of 26 miles, 385 yards. Why that distance? You remember Pheidippides, who in 490 B.C. ran about that far, from the plains of Marathon to Athens to announce the Greeks' victory over the Persians. "Rejoice! We conquer!" he proclaimed, and fell dead. That's how they decided on the distance.

It's important to note here that so-called "mini-marathons" (runs of 4-15 miles, commonly) are to marathons as a cup of soup is to a meal. The distance is crucial because body chemistry makes the last 6-8 miles of a marathon twice as hard as the first 18-20. Runners speak of hitting the "wall" at 18-20 miles, and generally divide the marathon into halves—of which the first half is the first 20 miles. A half-marathon of 13.1 miles is a lark. A marathon—quick now!—is a vulture.

I am intrigued by the Scaff plan and the Honolulu Marathon Clinic. I have no talent for running, none. Even as a skinny young man, in a school where one went out for all sports just to protect one's reputation, trying to run cross-country I could not manage the 2½ miles without hurting and walking. I was once

A Boston (Marathon) Bandit: On Assignment

so far behind the main pack (having spurted vaingloriously past the only two runners as sorry as myself) that I ended up alone. Past this fork and that turn, I saw no one, and began to suspect that I was lost. I asked two small girls sitting on a rooftop. They assured me that I was headed the right way, but not before conferring in giggles. Of course, I knew better and turned back. Wrong again: they had been telling the truth, and it was necessary to run by them once more—studying the ground. By the time I arrived at the schoolyard, my team members were dressed and waiting by the bus. Then the other school's cheerleaders decided to "encourage" me until, trying to complete the course, I ended up on the wrong side of a fence. A perfect last performance.

Still, I admired distance runners. I was even happy to see in running a metaphor for any long, serious effort, even writing, and when I wrote a book-length series of intense, sometimes tortured poems called *The Escape into You*, I began it with a poem titled, "Homage to the Runner." Its first line reads, "The form of this 'sport' is pain." Get it?

And I had always liked that story about Johnny Kerr, the pro basketball player with bad legs who set a record for consecutive games. Clearly, he played in pain. After he had set the record, he was asked how he could play hurt night after night. His answer: "I tell my legs lies."

So I set out to tell my legs lies. I ran a mile. Then I held onto the wall. I had already uttered a number of lies to my legs, and they weren't having any more.

Somehow, I got to where I could run a mile and stand up, to a mile every-other-day, to a mile-and-a-half, to an hour, to six miles, to twelve, to fifteen, to Oahu, and to the finish line of the Honolulu Marathon on the 9th day of December, 1979. I hadn't made it to Hawaii the first December because I had ended up on a cane during a crucial period in the training. But there I was one year later, barely 21 months after that first mile, 42 and not slender, crossing the finish line with what my wife was to insist was a smile but which the enlargement would clearly show to be a grimace. It had been hot, humid and hilly, and I had done minimal mileage in training, with injuries. My left hamstring had cramped at 18 miles. My thighs had stopped firing at 20. When I had finished, a young Hawaiian woman put a shell lei around my neck and asked how it had been. "I've been in Hell," I told her. And I had sworn during those last 6 miles never to do it again.

But there are beds and beds in this life. Beds of pain, beds of procreation, the irresistible beds of printing presses. First, *The North American Review* suggested I run Boston and write about it. Then my oldest son, Nathan, moved to Boston. Nathan, now 20, might be this country's only running vegetarian with a blonde Afro and a repertoire of his own songs. He had gone to Boston to write songs, play guitar and sing, not to take Bill Rodgers for king. Still, it's hard not to be impressed by Rodgers, who comes flying into Boston on his morning runs, doing a five-minute-mile easy-as-you-please. Also, it happens that Nathan is a former soccer player, with naturally strong thighs. His idea of running fun is to blow by other runners uphill. The Quadriceps Kid.

The Boston Marathon is infamous for the Newton Hills, 4 miles of hills at about the 18-mile mark. Nathan looks forward to going up them. I, on the other hand, would run them backwards if that would preserve the illusion of going downhill. Actually, downhill is harder on the legs. It's just that uphill is harder on the lungs, the esophagus, your ass and your elbow, and the little half-moons on your thumbnails that come from masturbation.

Back from Hawaii, the feeling of pain is replaced by the memory of pain, which is in turn replaced by ideas of memories of pain, and pretty soon I can imagine myself doing better. The key word is "imagine." I concoct a Plan to increase my weekly mileage, to work with leg-strengthening machines, and to do a 20-mile run each Sunday. This long weekly run is supposed to teach the muscles in the legs to find fuel when the usual sources are depleted. After 20 miles, running is like being in an endless OPEC crisis. Also, my legs are stupid. But I'm going to teach them.

Sixty miles a week. Twenty on Sunday. With my legs, I lift things and push things. But I'm not enjoying it. What with getting to the indoor track in bad weather, changing, stretching, running perhaps 10 miles, walking to cool down, stretching and exercising afterwards, using the machines, showering and driving home, my mornings are shot. Afterwards, I want only to load up on carbohydrates, congratulate myself and write in my running log.

But what of the glory, you might be asking. (I don't think you are, but you might be.) Sure, I remember the fireworks in the night sky as 7,000 people began the Honolulu Marathon at 6:30 in the morning. I remember the applauding spectators, the beautiful women along the streets in Waikiki, the theme from "Rocky" playing off to the side at 14 miles, the cheerleaders at 16, the liquid guitar and hula girls at 20. I also remember the shame of having to walk and run, walk and run, once I hit the wall. Around me, others were as bad off or worse. After 20 miles, all conversation stopped. I passed runners who passed me whom I passed who passed me . . . for six miles, over and over. Some tried stretching to get rid of cramps: no luck. Some had to quit. Some finished only to require a hospital cot and an IV in the arm. Hell, I was better off than many, even better off than some who finished ahead of me, yet I felt lousy. In a nearby tent, one could see the videotape of oneself finishing. I didn't bother to. I knew what it felt like. Why would I want to see what it looked like?

* * *

Now, three months after Honolulu, I again began to make that distinction between what it looks like and what it feels like. No one could

have done it for me. Until Honolulu, I had often wondered why younger runners in better shape than I settled for runs of 6 miles, or ran every-other-day, when clearly they could run a marathon. I had figured it out on a hot, humid day in Hawaii, forgot it, and now—faced with losing my life to longevity—was finding it out again.

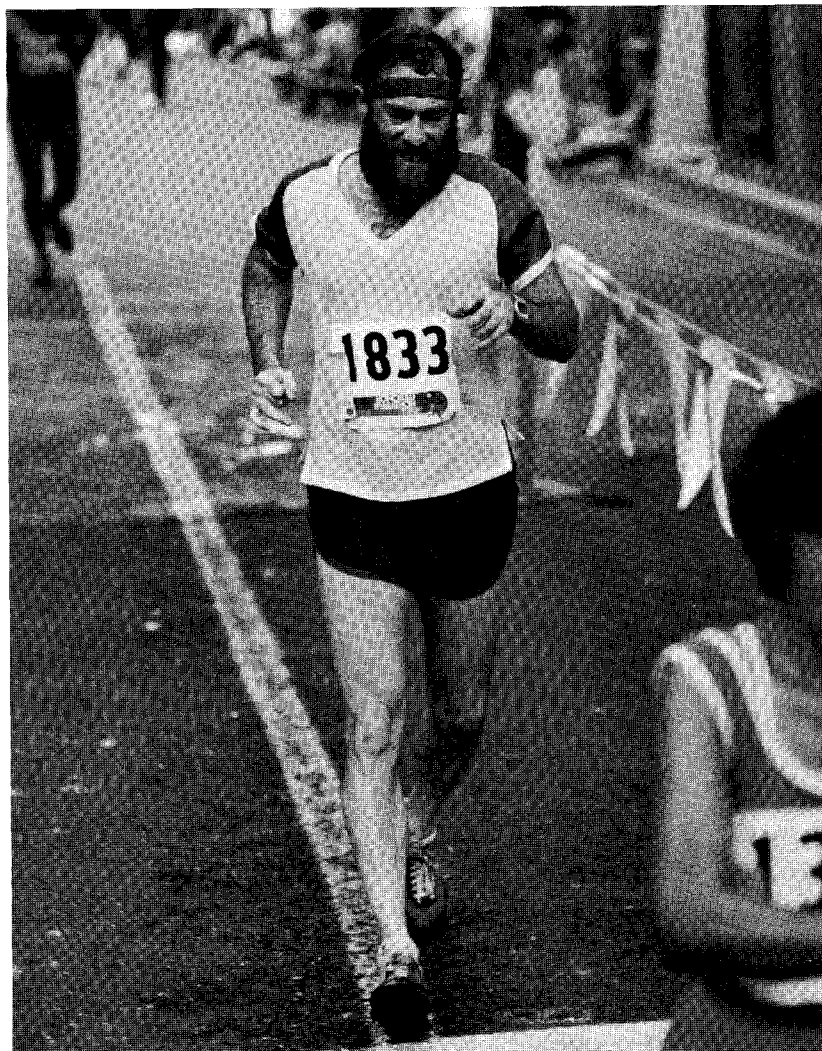
It seems to me that it seems to others to be something it is not. The notion that one gets "high" while running is nonsense. Just as profitable schools of meditation benefit from the simple fact that sitting still for fifteen minutes a day is good for one, so the running gurus benefit from the simple effects of exercise, which are substantial—and the better ones say so. One doesn't get high. One becomes aware of aches and pain. One doesn't solve problems intuitively or imaginatively, as one might during a night's sleep or during any interruption in a laborious attempt at organized problem-solving. One is too occupied with form, pace, footing, traffic and whether or not

one has pushed the wrong button on one's spiffy chronograph.

But by now it has become Nathan's turn. Nathan Uphill. Nathan goes running the Newton hills in the early mornings just to keep himself sane. For one thing, the music business is mostly business. For another, he has to pay the rent by working at a car dealership. He's the flake kept at the cash register, no one would buy a car from him. When an ill-tempered customer takes a swing at a mechanic, Nathan comes to the rescue and, with a strange move known only to song-writing-runners, floors the aggressor. Instant acceptance. Want to get your car fixed?

So he has to find out for himself, and he begins to follow the marathon training program I used—but with a Difference. He runs uphill. He runs two minutes a mile faster than I do. He has longer fingers on his left hand than on his right from bridging the guitar strings. I figure it has to be something.

Now the word that has been miss-



The author at the finish line in Honolulu. Is this man smiling?

ing from this article and from running books is the word "love." You can come close to it, I'm told, if you run the reservoir path in Central Park in New York City. It's not quite love, but it's something related. Or you can come close to it on the mall near Frank Shorter's running goods shop in Boulder, Colorado, where beautiful youth lounges about in the newest ultra-lightweight synthetic running clothes from Japan, and dresses up only to score cocaine.

It's real love that's got me still wanting to go to Boston, to run some of the marathon route with Nathan, and to see him through to his finish. I can't hope to run it myself. Along with my change in attitude ("Is it worth all this?"), I've had a complete breakdown. The 20-mile runs were too much. My annual winter sinus infection tore down my entire body. A flu came around. Then there were three days that felt like a stomach pump. Two weeks lost, then three. Only 28 miles one week, only 25 another, no running a third. Weight-gain. Injuries. There is now no longer any possibility that I can finish the Boston Marathon.

I shouldn't have cared about finishing from the start, I remind myself, for in Boston I can only be a "bandit." Boston accepts, officially, only those marathoners who have run certified marathons in what amount to excellent times (under 2:50 for men under 40, 3:10 for men 40 or over, 3:20 for women). They get race numbers. None other need apply.

But Boston doesn't belong only to the people who run it officially, nor to those elite runners who make the news and *Sports Illustrated*, next to the lipsticks and cigarettes. Boston is also for the crowds who line the race routes with drinks and hoses and sponges (Boston has few official aid stations and depends on spectators) and for the unofficial runners who stay behind until the official pack is away. They are the "bandits" who get nothing—no shirt, no certificate, not even an official time.

Nathan, who probably has the ability to train up to a Boston qualifying time, will run it as a bandit, and I will become a bandit too for as long as I am able. When I can no longer run, I will walk and send my thoughts ahead to push him up the Newton hills. At the end, he's going to hurt a lot more than he now knows.

Because of my inability to run the

entire course, I'm going to experience my love for him more than he will his love for me. Once he gets to 20 miles, the run is going to turn into a test and a demand, and a solitary event—so far inside himself that the runner can only make believe that he or she responds to others. Habit and convention make it appear they do, and save them, but they do not. It is this aspect of distance running—profound solitude—that makes it serious and special.

A sense of humor can save us, can teach us; it may even be a symptom of religious feeling or of the spiritual, as has often been argued. But those cut-rate journalists who only *laugh at*, who can make fun of anything, and who make fun of running, miss the mark. There's plenty to make fun of: the language of running (Here are three runners, halted at the corner, "listening to their bodies."), the silly equipment one can buy (sticks to ward off dogs, bragging belt buckles), the hopeless turgidity of training articles in *Runner's World* (do 3 440s at 6:30 with 7:30 220s in between followed by 20% of the first 6 until supper), but the running itself, like all physical acts, is its own reason and form, and defies analysis, satiric or straight. Moreover, the effort I put into getting to the finish line in Honolulu was quite as much for me as was Frank Shorter's effort in finishing that race in second place. Quite possibly, for me, more.

And yet . . . while it may be true that the road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom, it seems to me that sometimes one learns from excess only that one has been excessive. Clearly, I am of two minds. And so it also occurs to me that the mixed mind is a result of experience. They-who-do-not-know know they should not. They who do . . . ?

Running marathons may or may not be excessive. I may run another. But training continually, one to the next, is certainly excessive, at least for me. Since cutting back my mileage and the number of days I run, I have rediscovered what it means to stay a bit longer in one's pajamas, and to have the time in which to write a new poem. Or a piece like this.

Now you know the background. In four days, it will be April Fool's.

2

It is April 21st, Patriot's Day. The

Boston Marathon always takes place on Patriot's Day, a Monday. Between April Fool's and Marathon Day, I have been twice to Boston. On the first trip, I learn that Nathan has given notice at Peter Fuller Oldsmobile in Watertown and is job-hunting. On the second, I learn that he has taken a job at the factory outlet store of New Balance running shoes, where he works with world-class marathoners Vin Fleming and Kevin Ryan, where three-time Boston winner Bill Rodgers may stop in to use the phone accompanied by Finnish Olympic medalist Lasse Viren, and where employees get two hours off during the day to go running. I sense a deepening commitment on his part.

On the first trip, I get to hear him do a set at a weekend coffee house in Cambridge. In six months in Boston, he has turned from an exceptionally talented young musician into a powerful, driving performer, whose own songs and manner of playing and singing make those who precede and follow him appear to be exactly what they are: just college students. Next to his music, the young musicians with classical training seem just proper and the school of jazz graduates seem just smooth. I'm secretly proud that he has inherited my small-towner's skepticism about everything cultured and collegiate. My best advice to him is not to eliminate the rough edges in his art.

On the second trip, his music and running come together when he does some playing at the Etonic pre-marathon carbohydrate-loading dinner party, held at The Exchange in downtown Boston. Marathoners load up on carbohydrates for three days before the race, hoping to gain something for the last 6 miles. The chemistry of it is complicated and debated but most testimony is in favor of a pizza and beer the night before any long run. Good marathoners are light: the room is full of skinnies. The spaghetti disappears quickly. I sit in a dark corner.

From the dark corner I emerge into the warm light of Hopkinton, where the marathon will begin. There is band music, somewhere a reporter is interviewing "unofficial" runners, asking variations of the usual question: "Why would anyone run 26 miles, 385 yards, with no hope of winning, perhaps with only a hope of finishing, and with the certainty of lasting pain ahead?" Nathan, his

brother Jason (who has turned 14 the day before and who has come with me to Boston to surprise his big brother), Mary Colbert (with whom Nathan lives and who, like Jason, has the form to run us both into the ground eventually) and I find a lawn in front of a small church near where we suppose the unofficial runners will mass for the start. Nathan is antsy to begin. Everywhere runners are taking on water for what has turned out to be a hot day for a race (70 degrees; 80, it is said, on the pavement), putting on vaseline and tape, stretching, meditating and already forming within themselves concise explanations as to why they had to drop out along the way. Even defending champion Bill Rodgers is reported to have lost sleep, to feel lousy, and to give himself no chance of winning.

By such reasoning, I might be the best instead of the worst. The usual reckoning is that, simply to finish a marathon, one needs 60-70 miles a week for eight weeks prior to race week, with a month of building up the mileage before that, and a solid base period of running before the build-up. Good marathoners do more than 100 miles a week. With my breakdown and return to common sense, I bring to race day the shoddy total of 26 miles a week. If one eliminates the week preceding my collapse, during which I ran 62 miles, my weekly average is only 21 miles. In the week before race week, I ran but three days, 6 miles being the longest run.

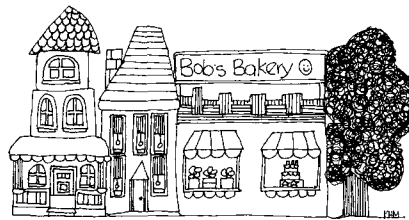
I know better than to try to go all the way. I figure I can go 6 miles, maybe 10. But the logistics are complicated, roads will be closed, Mary and Jason will be way down the route with water for Nathan. Hence, our plan has been for me to join Nathan after he crests the infamous Newton hills, those 4 miles culminating in what is called "Heartbreak Hill." That will leave 4-5 miles to the finish line at the Prudential Building.

But now it doesn't seem right to me to follow that plan. I don't want to cross the finish line if I haven't run the entire course, even if it's just to help someone else continue. I don't mind being a Boston Bandit, keeping out of the way of the better runners, starting behind that banner which reads, "The Back of the Pack." But I don't want to cross that finish line meaninglessly. Nathan feels the same, and has thought ahead: if the

official finishing chutes are still operating when he comes to the end, he intends to turn off before them. It is important to both of us neither to get in the way, nor to earn false credits.

Little do we know that this will be the race of Rosie Ruiz. As I write this, Rosie has not yet been disqualified and her fraudulent victory among the women in the Boston Marathon taken away, but I have no hesitation in saying that she could not possibly have done what she claimed. If she had, she would be the greatest athlete the world has ever known. She is a fraud, and every runner knew it immediately.*

Unlike Rosie, I can't see myself joining in near the end. The question remains: what do I do when I have to drop out in the countryside? I put a bandage around two dimes and a twenty-dollar bill and wedge the package into a tiny pocket inside my running shorts. I put on a blue sweatband and sunglasses. And I tell Nathan that I will run the first hour with him and that we will regroup at David Godine Publishers, five blocks from



the finish. If not, well, he will hear from me eventually.

The gun goes off at noon. No one near us moves. Then we walk. After four minutes and seventeen seconds, we walk across the starting line. Ahead, the heads of five thousand runners undulate like waves and I recall Gary Margolis' story of seasickness the year he ran Boston from The Back of the Pack. It takes seven to eight minutes before we are able to begin running.

The countryside is New England-lovely, the audience along the way is raucous, encouraging and generous. I take water to drink but turn down the hoses, not wanting wet shoes. I take orange slices, swallow the juice and spit out the pulp. I take ice cubes and wipe them along my

arms to cool the blood. We go toward Framingham and Natick. In towns, the crowds are thick and take up rooftops, trucks and fields. They crowd in on the race route and the kids line up to slap the hands of passing runners.

As planned, I slow down Nathan for an hour. Most marathons are botched by going out too fast. Then Nathan increases his pace and moves ahead. I wonder how hard it will be for him at the end, and where we will meet. Despite the enthusiasm of the crowds, I have the definite sense that no one along the roadway is planning to carry any fallen runners into Boston that afternoon.

In any case, I want to go farther, at least to make a long run out of it. I owe the NAR that much, and I really don't know quite where to drop out. Moreover, I have begun to think of Wellesley College—about 12 miles into the race. The Wellesley girls are well-known for forming a seemingly endless corridor (½ mile?; someone claimed it was ¾ of a mile—doubtful), forcing the runners into single-file, while they cheer and sing. "Lord," goes my pagan prayer, "get me to Wellesley."

And He or She does. And I do. And they are.

Someone says it's the half-way point: 13.1 miles. By now, my curiosity is up. I want to see how far I can go. I run without so much as a stop to take water for 17 miles before I recognize an advancing state of weakening thighs. I know from Honolulu that, once the thighs stop firing, I will be unable to run, hardly able to walk. Mental toughness will be of no use. The legs will be unable to push off, and coming down on a leg will be like coming down on sore, unprotected bone. Downhill running will be a terror.

I walk for five minutes—an experiment. I run two more miles. From now on, I must run and walk, run and walk. My personal goal becomes running the uphill, particularly Heartbreak. I do, passing many others, including one man whose arms and upper body are running but whose gone legs are walking. Indeed, it begins to look as if I can run almost all the way. I don't mind the pain and I begin to increase my pace as I start the last 4-5 miles of the race—all downhill.

Which is, of course, the last straw of vanity and He or She who got me to

*Rosie Ruiz has since been disqualified, and is alleged to have run only the last half-mile of the race.—Ed.

Wellesley gives me a cramp in my left calf like you wouldn't believe. A convulsion, a knot heard round the world. I grab a parked truck to keep from collapsing. When I can run again, I can't run much: the calf will not stretch out. I walk a ways, then begin to run. This time, I spot a small block of wood in my path, make a slight move to avoid it, and the right calf produces its own convulsion. I grab a lamp post. Someone offers a massage but I'm reluctant to sit down and not be able to get up.

From then on, I walk. The surprise of my finishing at all is enough to keep me going, and now there seems no point to running through Boston's bus and taxi traffic those last couple of miles. Nearing the end, I run again—feeling surprisingly good, no doubt because of the walking. I run under the digital clock, still keeping time, to the remarkable applause of those who are still keeping watch, at 5½ hours. It has taken me an hour and a quarter to cover those last four miles. There are runners behind me. There are runners stretched out on the pavement for medical help. There are runners in ambulances. I am not much of a runner by this time, and I feel no glory at having finished. But I do feel mildly and oddly satisfied, and I can hardly wait to surprise Nathan, Mary and Jason when I walk into Godine. I am, today, exactly what an encouraging bystander called me as I walked those last two hurtful miles: a survivor. I take no credit, but a small, clear, intimate pleasure which cannot be put into words.

Nathan has finished in 4:13, feeling the difficulty of his first marathon only at 24 miles—ah, youth. Bill Rodgers has won his fourth Boston, and says that the last six miles in the day's heat were gruelling. Don't I know it. Rosie Ruiz claims to have won the female division in a time accomplished by only two other women ever, crossing the finish line without sweat, without salt, without deep fatigue, without sufficient knowledge or training, without having run the 26.2 miles, without the pain of the last 6, without the mild shame of having to walk, without having experienced a sporting event no one actually sees, in a confusion of experience and outcome, in a mix-up of medals and moxie, in an utter loss of sense and senses.

If she wants to know what it was like, she can ask me. —*Marvin Bell*

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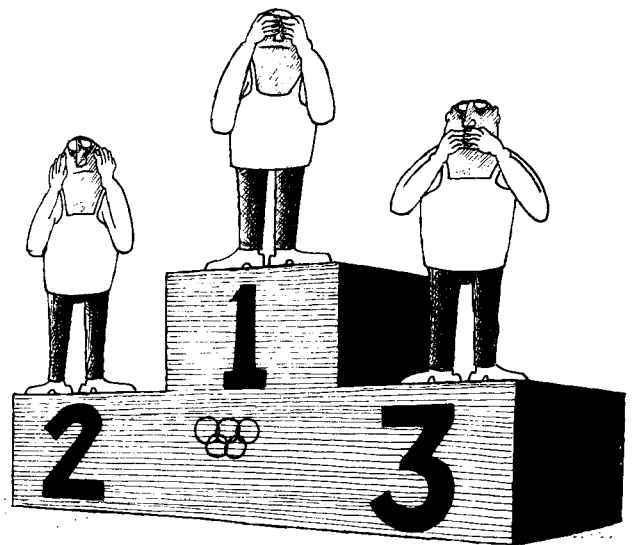
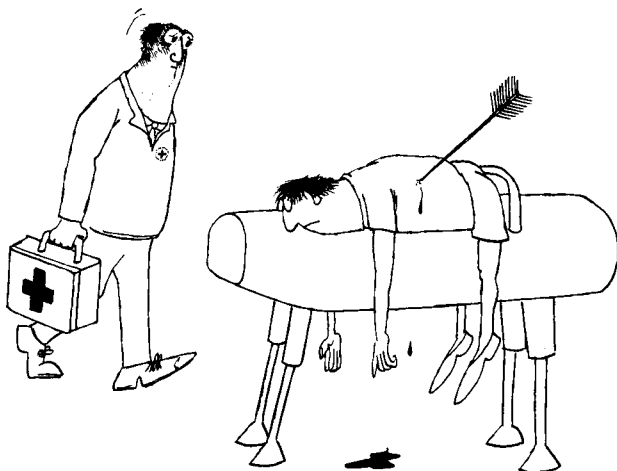
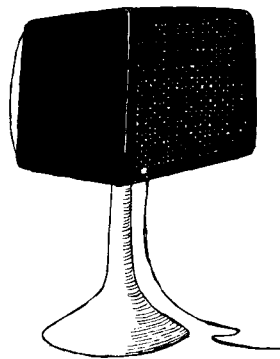
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Olympic Fever



CORK

To the Editor:

Still more commentary on the increasingly dismal subject of Jerzy Kosinski may be the last thing our beleaguered world needs just now. Yet the myth of Kosinski as one of our continually significant writers seems to die hard, and I find it difficult not to submit a few more paragraphs into the fray, this time in response to Daniel J. Cahill's overview in your March issue, "Kosinski and His Critics." To find the vacuous pomposity of Kosinski's later novels being presented as serious and even elevated philosophical fiction is one thing, if hard enough to accept. To find such presentation defended by logic that is thin, faddish, and chopped, however, is another.

The phenomenon of Jerzy Kosinski has been interesting (if not always rewarding), and Cahill has done a journeyman's task in chronicling the cranky disarray into which critics seem to have been thrown in responding to his works. But some of those critics deserve considerably more credit, or at least a more thorough analysis, than Cahill gives them. And certainly a more perceptive and questioning evaluation than Cahill's of the merits of Kosinski's later novels deserves a hearing.

One of the critics Cahill seems to have left out of his article helps provide such an evaluation. Writing in *The Nation*, Hans Koning says about the "violence" in Kosinski that has been so much talked about over the years by the tribes of critics: "Having lived under a German occupation myself, I have always been intensely uncomfortable with the images in *The Painted Bird*. In his new introduction, Kosinski writes that its critics felt it was too violent. That, assuredly, was not my objection. On the contrary, in my experience the violence was even more pervasive, but it was also less dramatic, less 'American.'"

Koning goes on:

To give an example, in *The Painted Bird* the Polish peasants perpetrate acts of the most cruel sexual sadism; it is as if the violence of the Germans conjures up a sexual violence among their victims. But in reality, the German violence was all tangled up with daily degradations and, more important, with hunger and cold. It did not engender sadism but sexlessness.

Kosinski Again: A Letter of Dissent

Men and women, perpetually humiliated, aware of their physical being in a negative way only, had little interest in their own or others' bodies, or in any appetite but for food.

My own response to the Kosinski canon has been to find much to admire in *Steps* and *The Painted Bird*, and to perceive in the novels following those an abrupt decline in quality, integrity, and substance. But, that aside, it seems to me that Koning's observations are of great interest not only in regard to *The Painted Bird* but also in regard to the novels that followed it. Koning himself makes the application. What he calls the "American" kind of artificiality in Kosinski can be seen, writes Koning, in virtually all his heroes, who "function as faultlessly as Mission Impossible agents or (joyless) James Bonds, whether murdering without leaving a trace, or outwitting the bureaucracies of Eastern Europe. Their setting is not the natural world, where plans go awry and people do the unexpected, but a mechanical one where every action leads to a foreseeable reaction." Not even Kosinski's bitter denunciations of Eastern European authoritarianism, says Koning, ring true. "With not a single idea or ideal motivating them but the thirst for power, everything the pseudo-scientists of those [Eastern European] countries think up must become a cruel travesty. On Kosin-

ski's pages, a mountain vacation for workmen as organized in the U.S.S.R. becomes a Breughelian tableau of vomiting peasants falling down the mountainsides where the Party orders them to ski. But while Kosinski's anger may be an indictment of those authoritarian bureaucracies from which he fled, the actual bureaucrats are people, more human, more complicated and perhaps more pathetic." And finally: "The light Kosinski throws on East or West is not a friendly one and not, I think, a true one. It distorts; it is the strobe light of an American horror movie, in which only absolutes are considered shocking enough to move the audience. In the natural world things are less stark, less mechanically acute."

Here, led by Koning's perceptions, we come to the crux of what is wrong with the Kosinski novels: they are, to state it most simply, not true. As post-Viet Nam audience, as post-Flower Child audience, and as audience angered and made uneasy by the grotesqueries of television and its innumerable social ills, many readers and critics have been conditioned to respond with near-automatic suspicion or denunciation at the least sign of anything that might reasonably be called "violence." Cahill's objection to this apparently vast school of criticism as brought to bear on Kosinski's novels is understandable. But in setting aside the objections of these critics as being misleading or inadequate, Cahill makes his own error. He is right in arguing that just because the novels are full of violence they are not bad novels. But he fails to perceive that they are indeed bad novels for the reason that they are in quite other and extremely serious ways distorting and false.

Again and again, as if avoiding this recognition, Cahill fails or refuses to follow up his assertions about Kosinski with any substantive or critically logical reasoning. Instead of talking about the "promise" of *The Painted Bird*, for example, he tells us about its bowdlerized first edition and about official Polish objections to it as "propaganda." Having asserted that in *Steps* Kosinski is like James Joyce in producing "an art of silence and cunning in which the reader is entrapped in a complicity of dark-

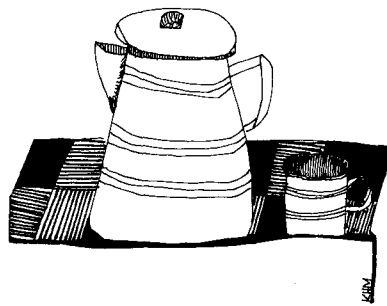


ness," Cahill follows merely with a run-down of "the Kosinski Hoax," concerning the phony re-submission of a typed manuscript of the novel. Instead of answering Anatole Broyard's charge that *Being There* is "Banality dressed up as profundity," he tells us only that the book has commonly been stolen out of boxed sets of Kosinski's novels. Instead of substantiating his assertion that "The final lyrical passages of *Passion Play* confirm his position" as "a storyteller, a spinner of tales," he merely (and it seems contradictorily) makes the deeply questionable remark that "American fiction is dominantly concerned with raw physical sensation hardly ever redeemed by ideas; Kosinski's fiction, however, is pre-eminently moral and primarily philosophical." And instead of explaining what he means by saying that "In *Blind Date*, Kosinski is true to his position as an adversary novelist and true to the tradition of philosophical fiction," he gives us, probably most ludicrously and pointlessly of all, an unconvincingly applied anecdote about Kosinski happening to be seated at a restaurant table next to a gaggle of professors discussing his novels. *Mirabile dictu!*

Suppose we return to the idea that the novels aren't "true," since of course this is the matter of most obviously central importance in judging them. Cahill approaches the question by approaching the critics. "The negative charges against Kosinski's fiction," he writes, "have been numerous. The most insistent tend to dismiss the brutal reality, the terrain of violence and vengeance, which is the pervading atmosphere of works like *Steps* or *Cockpit*. Is it merely a macabre 'make-believe' or an omnipresence in human existence?" He goes on: "One critic has complained that 'the novels are no longer derived from life in combination with the genius of invention, but they are derived from the clichés of popular culture itself.'"

But look at the logic with which Cahill meets that complaint. "As an expertly trained sociologist," he announces, "Kosinski responds that nothing in his fiction cannot be substantiated in the daily national newspapers." He then quotes Kosinski himself: "There is nothing in all my novels that can't take place in these United States in the very city block in which so many of us live."

I'll refrain from commenting on Cahill's ludicrous and pushy implication that because Kosinski is "an expertly trained sociologist," his literary judgments must be assumed to be heightened or enhanced. But I will comment in another way on Cahill's reasoning: once again, this time with Kosinski's own help, he has attempted to bring down a hammer blow beside the point. It's simply irrelevant whether or not "Behind each novel is a weight of threefold documentation far in excess of the narrative event." Few people argue that what happens in television soap opera couldn't possibly happen in life; of course it can. And yet few people concomitantly argue that television soap opera is "true"—and even those poor few who *do* so argue, wisely stop short, at least, of making claims for elevation, literary seriousness, or philosophical significance. In the case now of Kosinski: it may or may not be true that the ugliness, manipu-



lation, and violence that exist in the novels exist in precisely the same (or greater) degree and kind in life. Let's even assume that they do. This fact still doesn't make the novels "true" in any except the most literal, mechanical, and journalistic of ways (this is so; this isn't a lie; this really happened): hardly the kind of "truth" normally required for claims of literary greatness and philosophical seriousness.

What's important in judging the novels of Jerzy Kosinski is the same thing that's important in judging any other pieces of literary art: the critic must evaluate what the author *does* with his material. In the end, the critic must judge not the author, not the material, not the audience, and not the intent, but the piece of work, and this is an exercise requiring taste, impartiality, independence, and care. I've written elsewhere my own impressions of the later Kosinski novels.

However fallible my judgment may be, I find nothing in Cahill's essay—with its assertions about the real-life sources of the novels, their pointed philosophical intent, the thievery of them from bookstore shelves, and about their author's refusal to make them "a part of the staple trade of 'consensus' fiction"—to suggest that my judgment in this case was wrong. If any current fiction is in fact "consensus" fiction, "[feeding] the collective tribal ego a native diet of fast foods," such fiction still seems to me to include Kosinski's later books. Reading certain purportedly serious fiction can turn out to be remarkably like watching prime-time television, and this still seems to me true of Kosinski. For now, I'll have to stick with what I wrote elsewhere: "As in adolescent daydreams, everything in [the world of these novels] is privileged, effortless, slick, and without serious result; and, as in adolescent daydreams, these qualities simply cannot be imbued falsely with more meaning than they possess."

Any discussion of Kosinski is made more difficult than it might otherwise be by a number of things: the moral and personal awesomeness of the autobiographical sources of the first two books; the political volatility and suggestiveness of Kosinski's being a dissenting refugee from the Communist bloc; the abrupt and radical decline in the quality and integrity of the books following *Steps*, this at a time when the foundations for a critical reputation as a novelist of extreme and even philosophical seriousness had already been laid; the widely publicized, if sometimes simplistic, charges of sensationalism and immorality that accompanied the reception of his work in certain quarters from the start (and that were reverently suppressed in other quarters); the rise of a large popular audience for the novels, and of a certain faddism that Kosinski's publishers have endeavored with deep earnestness to capitalize on; the grim, stern, commanding, putatively magnetic, and eminently marketable presence of Kosinski's own personality itself. Cahill's essay suggests that he hasn't yet found his way past all these complications and through all these obstacles, hasn't yet gotten a clear and independent look at the books.

Eric Larsen
New York, NY

The following manuscript was found in a seat pouch of a Concorde aircraft. It was typed in French, but internal evidence suggested it to be a translation from American English. I have translated it back, to the best of my considerable ability. As you will see, it is a story. Or perhaps more properly, a conversation. A monologue, really. About the nose. As Hamlet onstage might consider the nose, were he alive and his usual self. To unravel it will demand your best effort. Monologues are never easy to comprehend. And this one is not simply new wave writing, but a fully developed Seventh Wave monologue of the contemporary Occident. It is called, with disarming simplicity, "The Desperate Miracle of the Nose."—KL

... whereas the stubborn lands, they drink tea and seldom eat bananas. What does anybody who likes bananas care about the truth? All they want is that where their teeth fall, there shall rise no dragons. If it's dragons you want, old and thick, go to the teadrinkers, the stubborn ones. Russia. China. All of the Orient, the shyly desperate whose daily taken pain is to say less by a dragon's length than he means leaving the animal to the nose, and the space it occupies to the poet. If there are thoughts of killing it, they belong only to Perfection here dressed in voluntary rags, instructing the countryside in desperation's final achievement while back in the city among rich smells of the bazaar, there is the miraculous, trading. The question is: do I smell a bargain—or a dragon? That is the question. Let your wife decide. They're better at it. *I smell a rat*, she says. Which is the dragon of the western world, and at the sight of mice pulls her skirts together, remembering greater days. Let me tell you about a teadrinking friend of mine, now dead, a plant physiologist, who for a professional reason I don't recall went with a colleague, north, onto the polar ice-cap and there stayed, two months, or until the colleague went mad. Whichever is shorter. Leading him back, he said, across the snowfields wasn't so bad until all at once he himself had a terrible spasm of nausea, out of nowhere. For no visible reason, he said, smiling. And which settled down into

Seventh Wave Writing:

It Visits the N.A.R.

waves, sweeping and washing across him like the sea, he thought. Until he considered that he was still vertical, and so he changed the image to the flapping of northern lights, which felt instantly more accurate. He looked around. Not a vibration. Not even a sky. The light constant, unmoving. It must, though, be the optic nerves: a disarray, he guessed, moving to form the patterns of snowblindness. He closed his eyes, and instantly staggered. His colleague didn't notice. And didn't notice either when an arm, heavy, leaned on his shoulder. He had been set to moving in a straight line, and he moved. He was healthy. They went on, that way. My friend kept trying to think, and he could. Amid the roil of nausea his mind, he said, hung still as on gimbals. In it, he considered: that the closing of his eyes was simply making his illness clearer. He opened them. Other vibrations? Movement? They stopped, sat. No difference. Vibrations of *what*? He looked around and above, listened around and below because of the ear, an assault on the



fluid of balance. Silence, yes, absolute. Mathematical stillness. And in it, a man sick to his stomach. He laughed. In it by now, he thought, a man with insides like driven snow. He thought of those biscuits left by the dead Scott in Antarctica, perfectly good years later. No sense dumping the garbage anywhere, it just won't rot. And suddenly he knew. That's when he gave up the idea of vibrations, gave up the eyes and the ears, he said, and apologized to his nose. Pinched it shut and felt a promise. Made waddings of torn handkerchief ends, stuffed them in his nostrils, got up and went on, better and better, down through the rim of decay (the smell-line, he called it when he told me this, laughing, which extended he guessed a hundred miles or more into the ice country) so now you know why chosen people have big noses and blacks are beautiful

* * *

“... while I'm getting to be nothing,” man in common cries. “All the meat's gone off me!” And he's right. “I didn't used to be like this!” he cries. Right again, stewing away at the bottom of cities like old soup-bones of the miraculous. What I need is a friend, he said, to fish me out “Go hire one,” said Tiberius. So he did and later in a cool room, awoke to lose the answer to a question long forgot “You were saying,” somebody said “Yes, the funny thing is, I think, that hardly anybody smells any more. Not really, all by himself.” “No need to feel guilty,” somebody says. “Look how delicate your ankles are.” So back to sleep he goes, mumbling perfection doth make cowards of us all fingering the letters while he tries to remember what it was like in the days of wonder, before his smell fell away in the stew of creation before fire, say, when the nose was first organ, not just sticking out in front of you but reaching like a tentacle through a scape of brush or jungle in its original blessedness more to be trusted than the whole kit bag of eyes, ears, mouth, etc., so to this day a snake knows its opposite sex only by smell which makes it easy to see why colds were fatal once and a sneeze still exorcised by prayer, even

though it's long years since the nose was used rather than assailed now appendix, clinging there on the porch of the face clogged, shrunk, amid the miasmas and distillates assaulted and asleep Baroque, the flattish triangle tricked out to three dimensions, full face, of the nose snoring in mid-day (and underneath miraculously, the mouth living to tell of it) dreaming of fresh bread and Polish tenements or if you wake it, hanging down like a thief, full of excuses as a Kafka character, who comes to his Judgment dressed as an animal and so might, for a joke, get in, given any humor of his own, but no, has none, has nothing but the picknose patience of a thief, sitting on his box of mottoes yes, prod if you will that old gray nose, out of its dreams, and it will give you not Tiger! but some damn rumor about Denmark or the woodpile go all runny over generalities of the season So? So the nose has become a social worker. There's truth for you. If that's what you call miracle

* * *

... and to someone else is just a big stink. "I wash my hands of it," he says, or in springtime gets asthma as for instance once, along the Arno, Mona Lisa smiling, now in all the colonies everybody, trying to have sex in order not to laugh in the good old days, saith someone, you had to be brave because of the stink, the stink was there to exact not as in heroism to task, no—to tax an assault, here levied with such puissance (L. rootword *posse*) against the nose, such penetration as to reach the very ears, which ring out dizzily, as if boxed (yes no wonder then, that my dead friend thought of vibrations) "Noisome!" the ear cries out from its mountainside, scaring hell out of the poor stomach below, which runs for cover under a retch while the dog stands there, happily lapping

it up and to this end: that in the guilty Australia of his youth, among his habits, he feared mightily that he was discharging arms, legs, fingers, et al. of his future children, and when he grew up a kindly man, could not discharge his employees nosing around in monasteries, incense over bones, he will tell you how it is that miracles are mute, as a snake is, stark, and how it is not silence but muteness, that fashions the vacuum our nature abhors so here comes art lugging its riches, plumbing tools to build a leak the Great A & P Gypsies, strumming *nil desperandum* whereas there was man once, who didn't need you to make him a picture, manufacture With eyes closed he listened to smells, and when he wanted pathos looked at his hands and so we have come, the poet says, here ancestors gone to weed the young in one another's arms, coughing

* * *

or take Michelangelo when they finally gave him a wall to paint that hung straight up and down, like clothes, he took off the clothes and put on the things that hang out or in. His last judgment. And when they unveiled it (svelare: to reveal), the Pope took one look and fell to his knees. Which was a joke on the rest of them, because what the Pope was unstrung by were the *faces* in it. A wise Pope. And wisely had it covered up again for days after, the alleys and atria of Rome echoed with the stomp and whinny, the chortle, of a Michelangelo in high glee, his crimped back shaking, spit bubbling in the curl of his chin, yelping "I got ye!" (a phrase borrowed from Captain Ahab), and "Rumpelstiltskin!" (from the Gothic) So you see, the key to the miraculous is desperation not the rain as in snake dances, or Ireland. Desperateness coddled. Gone in the teeth, and so grinning like Death.

Dragons blooming right and left. Business is good in the misty isles But make no mistake: loss of teeth does not bring Desperation. It brings toothlessness yes desperateness, Hipsters. Talmudic scholars. The Great Aphorism and Pantograph Tea Company. Foregathered. Whether at round fires, town squares, or across the parallel backyard fences of the world with underclothes flapping whereas the one who, billowing in the vatican of his bed, heard from land that cacklelaugh of Michelangelo whereupon he leaped out of sleep. So swiftly as still to be able to feel in his chest those strings last plucked, their mute tremor. Feeling lost in the abrupt silence, lonesome in it, he sniffed for the smoke of fireworks. And found none. And lost his dream. And in what is known as the desperateness of day, put on the coffee, smelled that, and lost even the memory Be able to breathe dead hippo, Conrad says. Yes. I tell you that painting was the truth. It roams now, safely up at the back of the brain. I let it out sometimes. To the detriment of the hand I'm holding. Then back it goes, clank! to the zoo. *Il Miracolo*, captured and titled. Peace along the alimentary canal, patchouli behind the tombstones all that remains being a slow leak, like the occasional tear that comes unbidden and sits in the eye, gently itching until it spills, of course, down the side of the nose, which wakes at once with a joyous sniff always ready for a warm bath or Memorial Day. W.C. Fields speaks of it. At the age of 15, he said, among my preparations for leaving home I hit my father over the head with an empty peach crate. It was a moment of poignant misunderstanding. Yes. So he set up his stand among the pilgrims But with pilgrims there's always that hard-won affinity for microbes You can hear all about it on records, if you buy one of Ezra Pound's. A pair of synagogue voices trying to raise the dead

Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto Him, "Lord by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days."

Outside, the animals two by two. Captain Wino in the wheelhouse. The Great Fresh Start. Yes. And a spume of claustrophobia in the land because you see, the air goes around dissolving things. In the country of the nose it is always raining

—Kenneth Lash

Coming in the NAR:

Mary Peterson: The New Popularity of Timber Frame Houses
Scott Edwards: Reasons to Support Draft Registration

Fiction by Lee K. Abbott, M. Kimberly Calvillo, Jim Christy, Joe David Bellamy and others

Poetry by Nancy Esposito, Carolyn Maisel, William Pitt Root, and others

In movie-making, considerably more time is spent in getting ready to shoot than shooting. On a hypothetical feature picture in the work day of 8 to 10 hours you don't schedule more, give or take, than three script pages. On features (in contrast to television movies where a schedule can call for 7-up pages/day), you work slower (hopefully) so there's time for the meticulous intricate craft/art of the first of the two parts of the hardware side of film's creation, putting the image on it—the lighting, the camera moves, the effects, the work of the crew. (The second part, of course, is the manipulation of those images—the editing.)

If, rule of thumb, a script page is roughly one minute of film (a 90 minute movie = a 90 page script—right?), then making the day's schedule means three pages, three minutes of film. Three good minutes the camera is rolling, that's all? Well—wait a minute, you have to figure the number of takes that don't get printed. . . maybe 5 or so in each shot. And, of course, there may be 10 or 20 camera set-ups to cover the day's scenes. So maybe the camera is rolling 3 minutes × 5 minutes × 12 set-ups which equals 180 minutes—3 hours. That's 6 hours it isn't rolling, and that's when, given this hypothetical 9-hour day, the equally hypothetical three good minutes, the lighting and setting up is going on.

Literally—to save wear and tear on them, to protect their artistic concentration, because *they are numero uno on the pecking order list*, the stars aren't around for all this. With the director and the D.P. they block the scene, and after that they are in their dressing rooms—to wait, to study lines, read, sleep, do dope, drink, entertain, tie flies—whatever is their wont. So, there are bodies hired to be on the set in their place. Along with the bit players (who stand in for themselves), the *bodies* stand on the marks put down when the stars blocked the scene, wait while the Director of Photography decides and the electricians execute the lighting he wants, wait while the camera is focused, its moves roughed out and the flags and cutters set by the grips. *Stand-ins*—what else could they be called? Classified as extra players in movie business lexicon, on the peck-

Stars & Stand-Ins Wanting Fame, & Not

ing order that's pretty far down; extra players are atmosphere, in the background—anonymous; everybody else makes more money—but there's overtime. Still, in the movie business what it's all about is to have *money/a name!* And they're anonymous.

Stand-ins, albeit unseen on the screen, unmentioned in the credits, play a central role. First off what they have to be is the same height as the star, with similar hair and skin tones. Pawns they are, to be moved from mark to mark. Patience is *the* virtue. They also have souls. If it's not exactly exacting, and it can be very boring, more than the other actors, they become a part of the crew—for better or for worse. Some I knew did it because they were aspiring, thinking they could learn something about film from the star and being right in the center on a movie set, and—for better or worse—that's true.

* * *

In January I was in Hollywood working on the live-action part of a



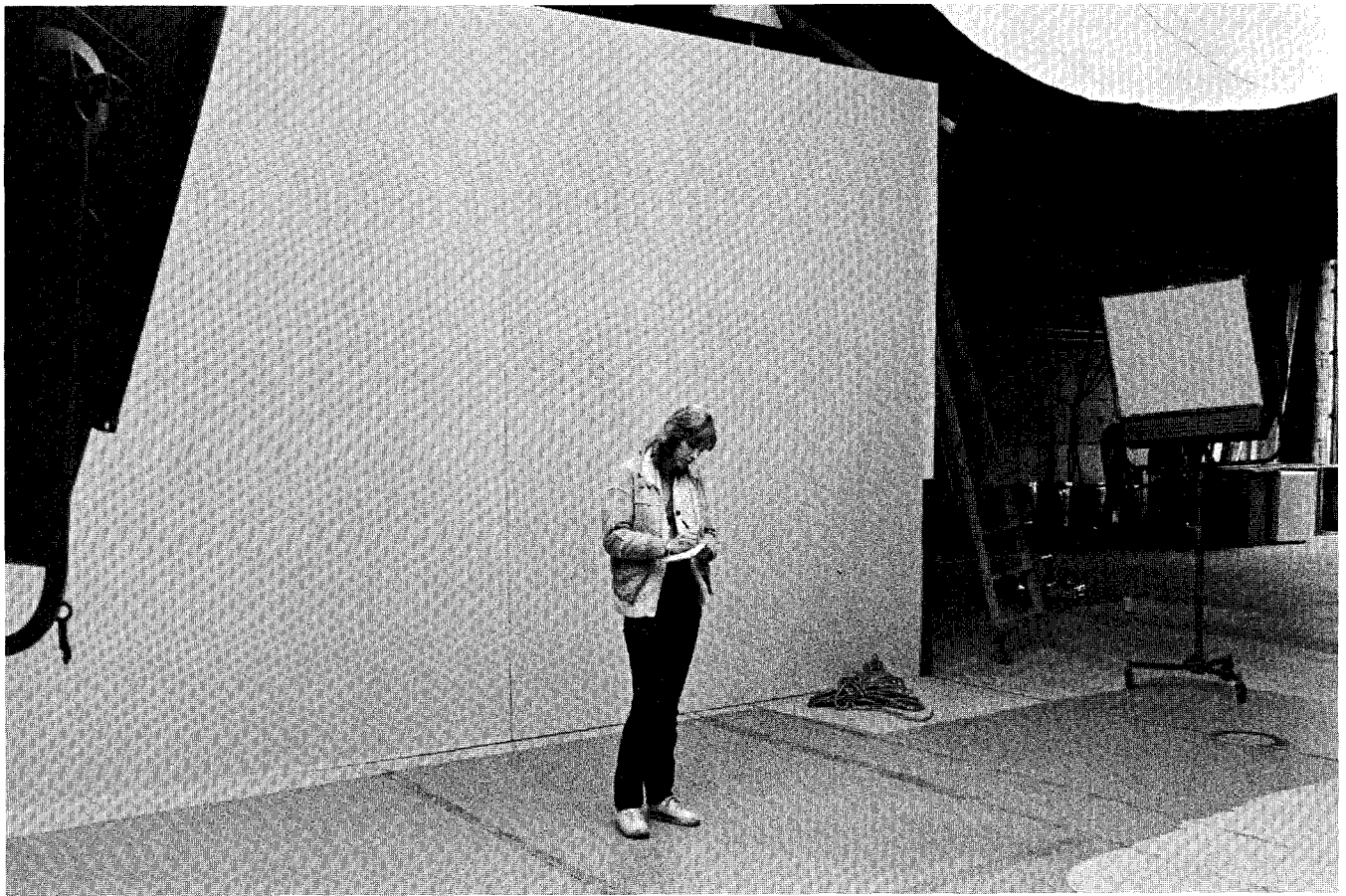
television special, a kind of history of the comic strips. The show, aired on CBS in May, titled "The Fantastic Funnies," was shot partly in one of those one-stage small studios that are scattered around film city, this one on West Pico, the studio manager/owner an improbable ex-New York lady with energy and accent and wit to match.

A pleasant job, but no big production this. The total crew was 10, it was 16 MM, and in effect each scene was a set piece, the host of the show introducing the various cartoonists or their strips—clips that would be cut in in the editing room. Among them are Charles Schulz, Al Capp, Mort Walker, Walt Kelly, the strips: "Peanuts," "Li'l Abner," "Beetle Bailey," "Pogo," and my fantasy favorite, "Prince Valiant," created by Hal Foster in 1937. During the course of the shooting I found out something—which I had never thought about—that comic strips are often autobiographical—like other forms of creative expression.

No, it was not a big job, no feature picture by any means. And outside it rained. The wind blew from the Pacific, and it was cold. This was the first of those heavy storms that hit the west coast last winter, in the Los Angeles area—as usual, washing some hillside houses down the steep canyon streets, some beach houses into the sea.

Because the star host, Loni Anderson, was only contracted for 2 days of shooting, and you don't pay Loni Anderson's rate to have *her* move from one piece of camera tape to the next all day, a stand-in was hired for the day of preparation we had to put up what there was of a set, rough in the lighting, get ready. The two of them, *Stand-In* and *Star*, never met.

Not, it didn't appear, that this stand-in could care less. To hire her I called Central Casting and asked for a blond, standing Loni's height; promptly on her call the next day she showed up. Pleasant, good looking, a little remote, this 5'8" young blond woman wore a sheepskin jacket over a white cable knit cardigan over a shirt, the top three or four buttons of which were open to play hide and peek with her full breasts. To pass the time, standing in front of the blank flat which, later, would have



the blown-up comic strips double-faced to it, while the crew (eyeing her) moved the lights around, and the cameraman figured out his shots, she revised her address book.

And smiled and answered when I asked, no, she wasn't working as an extra waiting for the big break, she was a professional extra, a local girl, native *Angeleno*, who happened to be working in the local cottage industry, making her own life. Interesting—the anonymous life, another kind of mask, like we all have, looking to hide inside our lives.

Hollywood is always strange to me. On the Ventura Freeway, through a pouring rain, I see the exits are noted in 10ths of miles—.2 to one place and .4 to the next; that's a lot of exits, and what's the metric system going to do to those signs? In fact, of course, what's the oil situation going to do to the freeways? Such thoughts come to you as you drive, amidst hundreds of other cars on 6-lane roadways elevated above the streets.

Really, it's one town where people are in deep trouble when they're in an ambulance—I am driving up a crowded Wilshire Boulevard on a rainy terrible night, and from the top of a hill I can see about 14 blocks ahead and there's a red light flashing, moving towards me. It's an ambu-

lance coming—you can't even hear the siren. But everybody stops. Right then. Me—everybody—stops!

Where I stayed, in the once-grand-but-now-looking-slightly-used (in spite of being in Beverly Hills) hotel, by the toilet, on the wall, they had a telephone. That says something about stress, constipation, cancer, and the visions and revisions riding on words on a telephone in Tinsel Town! There *is* no place sacred anymore.

You have to have *it*—that phone—but to be too available to it means you don't have anything really big right now to do. In Hollywood that's next to being a straw dog that people kick. In Hollywood you need at least five big ones going, all at the same time. That shows everybody else who is the top dog! Be there to answer the phone—but, not right away, there is *that* telephone drill. The new version, at least to me, of answering services is not "please leave a message and I'll tell them you called. . . ." but a pleasant lady who screens the calls coming in. Call the listed number and the switchboard picks up and calls the party to see if they're in to you.

And on the back streets, between Sunset and Santa Monica, above that stretch where all the topless joints

and quicky-chic discount clothing drops are, the heavy, heavy old fashioned apartments, seedy, run down, cracked and broken stucco, if you're battered, broke and busted in the movie business, and you have to live down there, man, that's when you have an address at a mail drop and one of those switchboard services—that's for sure. For in such shape, for God's sake, somebody should know!

2.

*"I'm Popeye, the sailor man.
I'm Popeye, the sailor--or
maaan. . ."*

Loni Anderson sings. Hot property at the moment, star of a hit series, "WKRP," on magazine covers, feature stories (In NAR yet), guest shots, testimonials, she's 33, from Minnesota, and did her first play when she was 10—in school as an Indian Princess in a musical. She was always acting in her bedroom, holding performances in the garage and charging the neighbors. But she never said to anybody, "Guess what I want to be when I grow up—an actress—" She already had the drift from her parents—that's good, dear, that's what everybody wants to do, but "what about nursing school?" What she told them was that doing it

was for fun, and she was a kind of loner anyway, very shy. But "I have a teaching degree for mom and dad—which I've never used." Her father, who was a chemist, has been dead now for several years. He had a sense of humor and was a movie buff—especially for comedy.

She was in little theatre through her teens—into college (University of Minnesota, where she took a major in art and a minor in theatre). Community theatre—"that was my entire social life," she said. The first paying job was on a "showboat," \$90 a week and melodrama, dressing in cramped quarters in the hold of the boat with blankets separating one actor from the next. She had, in those early days, black hair.

A production of "Born Yesterday" came up, but the company couldn't find an Equity Actress they liked, so they opened the door to non-equity people. She wanted to do it very bad,

had always wanted to do it! So she got a blond wig and went in to audition. She got the part and on opening night took off the wig. The director said "he would have hoped he would have had the foresight to cast me even if I had come in as a brunette. . ."

For the next five years she acted in little theatres all over, the mid-west, Florida. "It's something like *this business*, where after you've done a few things everybody knows you and they hire you." She became a kind of leading lady to the visiting stars on the repertory circuit, playing all kinds of roles, a lot of them musical. "Fiddler," "Showboat," "Threepenny Opera." She sings and dances both, "in a fashion," in her words. "I always considered myself an actress who sings and dances, not a singer or a dancer."

She and her second husband were in the same play, and Pat O'Brien, one of the stars, encouraged both of

them to go to Hollywood. He said to her, "out there were a lot of pretty ladies, but not a lot of pretty *funny* ladies." So, when both of them were out of work at the same time they thought—why not? They had enough savings to last one year. Why not? They moved here in January, five years ago, and she did her first role in March.

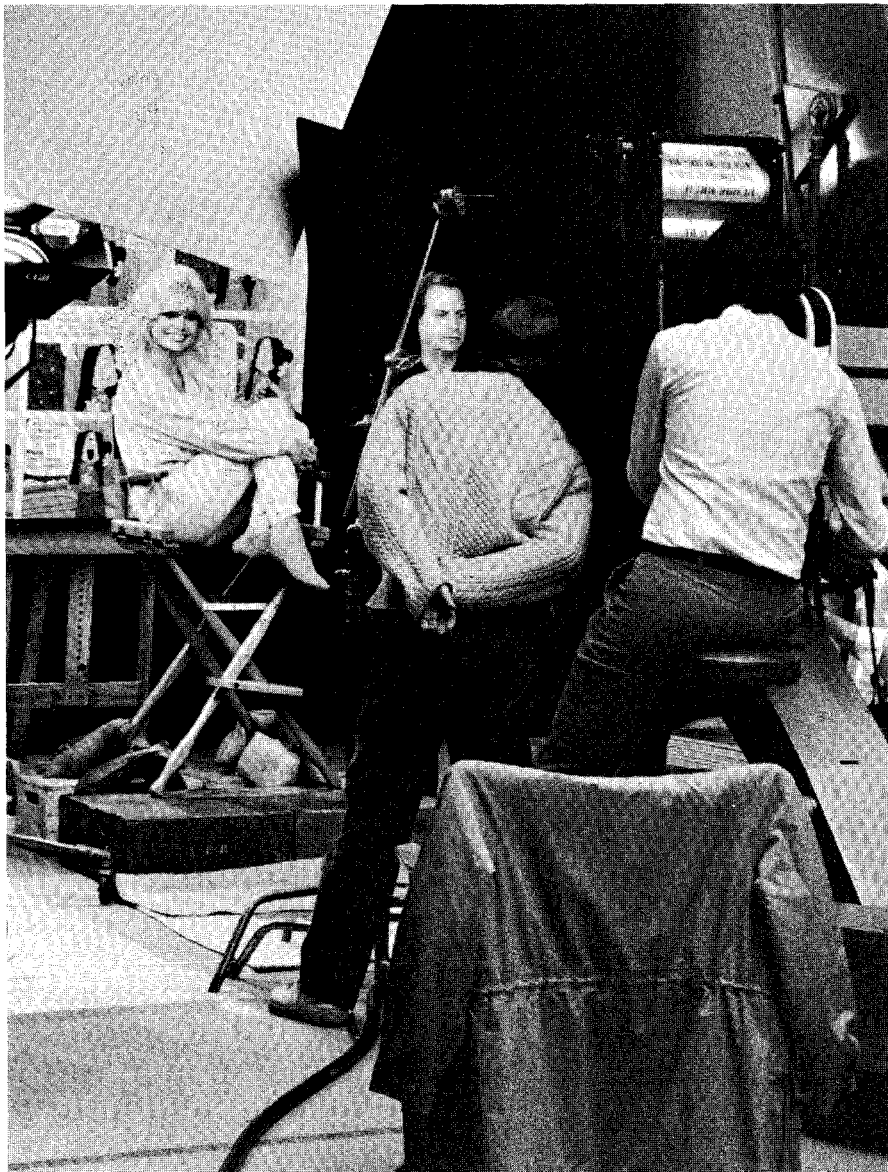
"I was very offended when I first got here, because I'd come from a stage background where I was hired for my talent, and out here everybody kept asking how I looked in a bikini—?" When asked by one of the entourage in the dressing room, "How did you look?" Loni says forcefully and with a laugh: "Good enough to get every job I got—in a bikini! One scene would always be *in a bikini*. But hopefully people were also able to see that I could speak.

"At CBS I must always wear a bra as Jennifer. ABC seems to have me bra-less and half nude all the time. And at NBC they wouldn't allow my tummy to show in a bikini, and oh yes, CBS, no nipples—you can have blood and guts and cleavage and everything—but no nipples. . .

"Having a sexy body doesn't necessarily mean that everything else ends there, and that's all you get noticed for. I mean, it's almost as though you get penalized for having it. It just happens to be one of those things I've got, nothing I trade on. I'm a comedienne, I'm not a model—that wasn't my background. I really don't think there's anyone else in my position in the movies."

Also, in the beginning, when she would audition people would tell her she didn't look funny, and to be funny people needed to be funny looking. . . And she would say, well—she hoped that might change because people forget that Claudette Colbert, Myrna Loy, Irene Dunne, Lucille Ball, Carole Lombard were beautiful women who were *funny*—only it just went out of style for a while. Others would tell her she had created something new—and this she would vehemently deny, maintaining she just brought something back.

She has done research into old style comedies (the romantic comedies of the thirties—what is sometimes called the Pantheon era of American film—under the aegis, primarily, of the old major studios and the archetype moguls), and "Cary Grant is my favorite person to



watch, I think he is the epitome of comedy timing and style." To the question of whether comedy is better improvised or scripted, she answers scripted, unless the performer is a writer. Too many times improv people think they are funny when they are not. "Funny is an instinct, not something that can be learned, but it's also something that can be fine-tuned, practiced. People who *try* to be funny are not—it just doesn't work."

(It should be noted that she is always laughing or smiling in a pleasant way, and that she's very bright and sparkly, fueled by her current success. And at the same time there is *that* face and *that* body! Which is like a ticket into Hollywood.)

"Doing WKRP is one of the most creative atmospheres I've ever worked in. They do the show like it's the opening of a Broadway Play every week. We rehearse five days, and then do it for a live audience." It's a tape four-camera shoot, and the actors are allowed to create as they go—add lines, have input. "Absolutely!" she says. It's an MTM Production, 8 ensemble players, no stars. Half of her fan mail "comes from women who appreciate that being attractive and sexy is also liberated all of a sudden, and smart! So I get hugged in stores by grandmothers who say, 'Oh, I wish I were young again, because in my generation nobody could say the things that Jennifer says.'"

WKRP is in its second season and Loni is not bored with it at all. There is such a large cast, and it's so exciting to watch the others work that she can't possibly get bored. There's a hiatus that lasts over a month so she can do something else. The executives, the head writer and producer are also stimulating, so it's ideal for her now—so she said in January.

In March in Army Archerd's column in *Variety* Archerd asked her about returning to "WKRP"—which at that date she had not signed yet. "I would like to stay with the show," she is quoted, "but a little more money wouldn't hurt." That sounds like the standard contract-opening-negotiation gambit; and is different from her just liking it in January; which is how worth/value is equal to value/worth in Hollywood. That's sad.

And continuing with Archerd, she is quoted: "There are no nude photos

of me floating around. . . I never did any. . . Playboy has been after me to do them since I was 17. . ." She had said to me, almost plaintively, ". . . I mean it's almost like you get penalized for having it. . . It's nothing I trade on." Yet she *does* trade on it; her body is part of her. The sad part of that is that—puritan as we are—she can't say straight out that she trades on it, but she doesn't allow it to be *exploited*. It is, in fact, only a part of a very talented whole.

In April she started shooting a TV movie based on Jayne Mansfield—to be on the air in the fall. In January in Carthay Studio, while she was being made up for "The Fantastic Funnies," we had talked about that; she was excited about it. When the project was first mentioned she said no, if they were going to exploit the image that Jayne projected, the sex symbol. "A character study I was interested in, because obviously there was a woman under all that. . . and it would be nice to know who she was." The TV movie script she got was exactly that—a character study. She told me how Jayne also started out as a brunette, and very bright! But in her time she buried it all because at that time inside the persona she created it was not possible to *be bright* to the world. She changed her voice, her walk, her hair, and became a caricature of herself. Jayne playing Jayne. She thought it was a joke, according to her husband, made fun of herself all the time. Jayne playing Jayne. Always measuring her chest, she became wound up in it herself, couldn't get rid of it; she had created a monster. She self-destructed because, in spite of her success, she wasn't accepted as an actress. Then, being insecure about it, the sex symbol became her: she created it, and when she tried to get rid of it, she couldn't and finally she didn't want to.

Loni Anderson has talent and perspicuity—it was very obvious even in the relatively simple bits she did those two days. She was pleasant, friendly, a quick study, and was very clever about putting a little twist on each character she played. She will obviously be very good in this upcoming film, and that film might just be very good. Of course she could be terrific and the show a disaster—there is many a slip 'twixt production cup and network lip. And too, one of the other networks—in a friendly

spirit of rating raiding—is shooting Marilyn Monroe for airing in the same season. So, in the fall we will have two *docu-dramas*—this year's historical gloss, the revision of the lives of those two fascinating ladies who died, it seems, only yesterday.

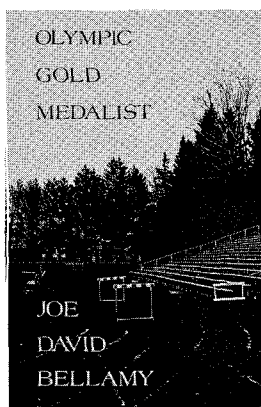
Loni likes what she does, the character of Jennifer—"neat" is the word she uses, seeing a value to not being conventional in TV, neither a detective, nor "ding-dong," and aims "to doing good work," wherever—theatrical movies, theatre, TV. . . "When I'm sixty I won't be a sex symbol any more, but I'll be working. It makes me laugh, it makes my daughter laugh that I am one at all. I didn't go along playing 'Fiddler' in no makeup, black hair, big klunky shoes, black stockings, thinking I was a sex symbol. Well—so this came as. . . well, a nice road to something else, or it's nice to know. I think the problem with too many sex symbols is that they didn't have any place else to go, they didn't have any background. . ."

Through the history of film there have been different representations of women, and, concomitantly, different audience points of view to the representations. In our time women have been demanding equality in treatment with men. Maybe ten years ago there were male stars and male stars, but recently there are male *and* female stars again; and it's past time that it should be so.

But there is also a sex symbol/image increment, and some of the ladies (and men) with that have let it strangle them. Like Jayne Mansfield who was probably only known for it, and Marilyn Monroe who started there and became a talent—or to say it better—had her talent acknowledged. But, apparently, she could not accept that for herself and so went down the tubes.

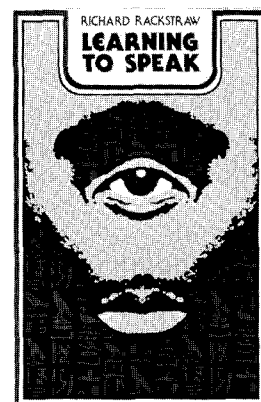
The stakes Loni Anderson is playing for are very high. Sex is always a ticket to something, but in Hollywood the price of that ticket can be prohibitive. Into it there's all that glamour and myth and ego and money—the managers, PR people, and chauffeured limousines. Nothing small like being the queen or the whore in your own town, this is on the big screen! World wide people look at you, envy you, lust after you. That's not light, and it can settle in, and then it can be all she wrote.

—Lawrence Sturhahn



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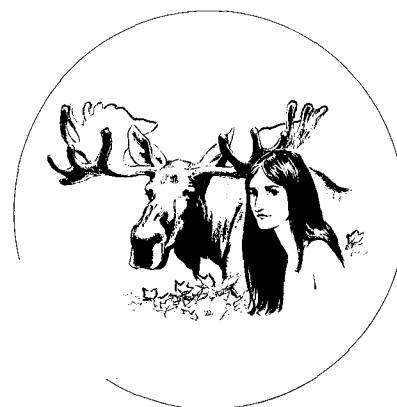


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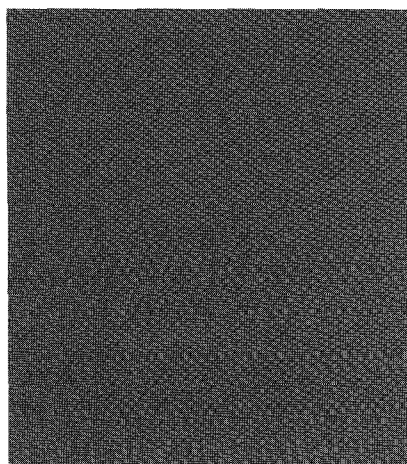
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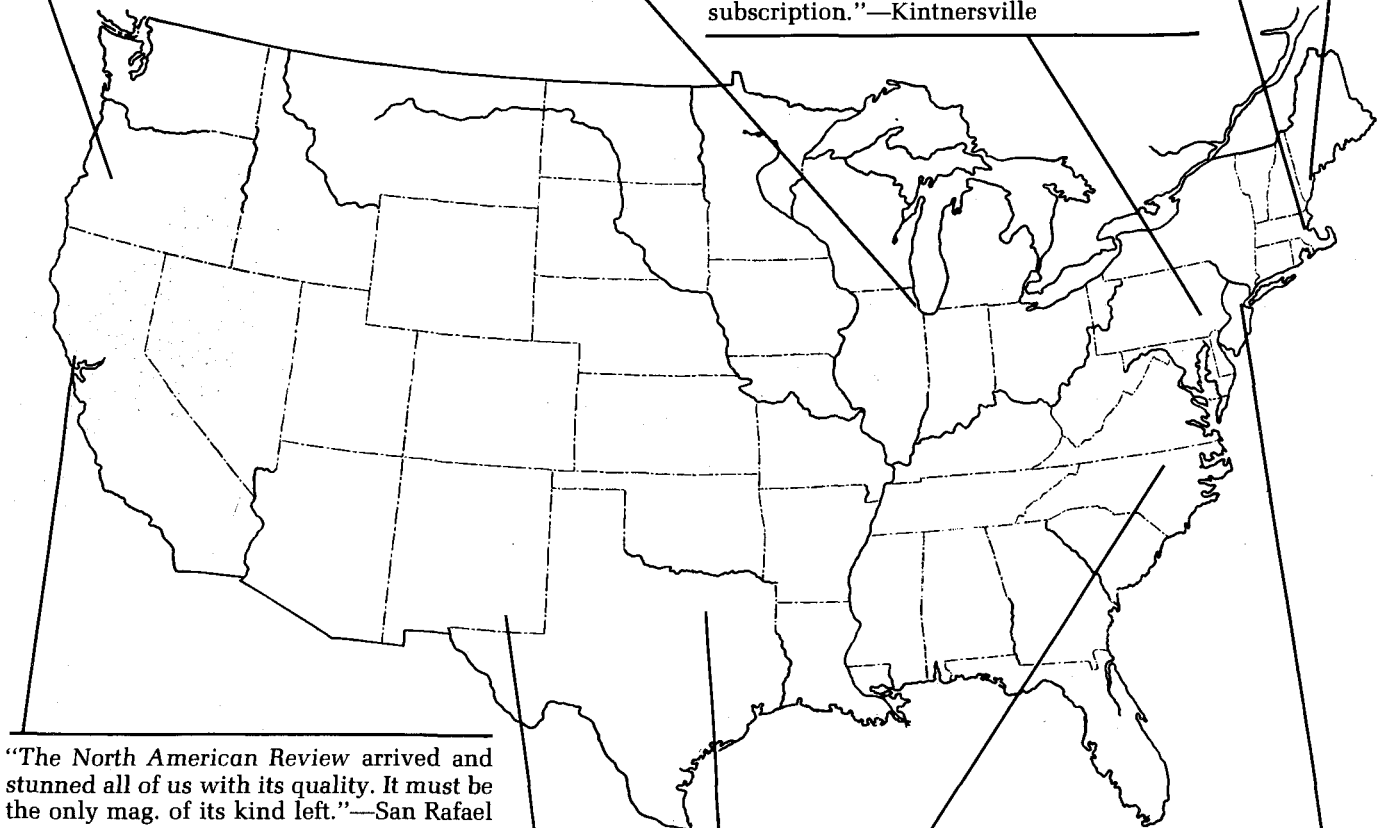
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